THE

GOLD-WORSHIPPERS:

OR,

THE DAYS WE LIVE IN.

A *FUTURE* HISTORICAL NOVEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "WHITEFRI

"Corrumpere et corrumpi. SÆCULUM vocatur."
TACITUS.

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GOLD-WORSHIPPERS.

CHAPTER I.

We must not imitate the Gullibulls altogether in the profound neglect with which they unanimously agreed to treat Charity Green, as a punishment for her unwarrantable desertion.

A few weeks saw her very quietly established in her new position: and we own, that for a month or two we should find it rather difficult to discern anything in her progress which it would amuse an indifferent reader to recount. Her manner of life was very slightly diversified—and this was its usual tenor. She arose very early in the

morning from a couch shared with Miss Dishnap. They breakfasted together, with the invariable adjunct of a third party, in the shape of a small but very handsome jet black cat, with a red collar, called "Cookey." This was the sole inhabitant of the house during the day; which after breakfast they set in excellent order. It was, indeed, a little miracle of neatness. Miss Dishnap belonged to a cleanly genus; but she was remarkably so. For that reason she could not bear to live in lodgings, or to receive lodgers into her house, and kept a little cottage entirely for her own use. The rent indeed came excessively heavy on that account, (it was eighteen pounds a year) and the place was lonely. But Miss Dishnap had no moveable property of any value, so feared no robbers; and she said that the difference of a few pounds per annum was amply made up by "having one's own house to one's self." She could indulge her passion for cleanliness without disturbance; and accordingly she

truly boasted that you could eat your dinner without disgust from her floors.

After breakfast and a furbishing of everything which, however slightly, needed it, Miss Dishnap carefully locked her house up, and off the two trudged, wet or dry, to the bazaar. There they spent the remainder of the day, each engaged in her occupation, often silent, but always in a good humour with one another, and apparently with the world in general. In fact, they knew but little of its concerns. Neither of them ever read a newspaper, and had scarcely an acquaintance between them.

Miss Dishnap's idea of life, indeed, prevented her from taking any very lively interest in its transactions. She lived because she did not die—not that she wished the prolongation of her existence. The misfortunes of her youth had acted on her whole career as certain acids act on substances, depriving them of colour, and rendering them incapable of ever receiving any. The only subject which seemed now to have much

interest for her, was religion. Like most persons of strong feeling assailed by misfortune, Miss Dishnap felt the need of consolation and assurance. She had become a Puseyite, not finding those qualities in the routine and formal observances of the Anglican church, or in its dubious and speculative teaching. Thence she passed without much difficulty with a favourite teacher over to the Roman-catholic ceremonial, and frequented the chapel of the Oratory, largely imbibed the doctrines therein promulgated with so much warmth and eloquence, and exerted all the zeal of a proselyte to bring Charity into the same opinions.

And what was Charity's religion? She would have been puzzled to describe it in the formula of any catechism. She was a christian in heart and soul, and it is therefore probable that she was unfitted to be of any sect in particular. Her father was by education a protestant, but in practice a freethinker, of so extensive a liberality, that he never attempted to bias his child's

mind even to his own latitudinarian principles. Her mother went very rarely to church; she was in general very badly dressed, so that the beadle always placed her with the few paupers who thought it worth their while to enter a building obviously intended only for smart people, who could afford to keep pews. Mrs. Green could not digest such treatment, and she left off attending church almost entirely. Mrs. Gullibull went to church whenever she had a grand new gown, or gorgeous parasol, to display. But she was often ill on a Sunday. We cannot therefore say that Charity was very deep in controversial divinity of any sort. But she was gentle, obliging, and tractable, and willingly accompanied Miss Dishnap on her devotional excursions.

She was not, indeed, like her companion, rewarded with a full meed of consolation and hope. Miss Dishnap derived a perpetual comfort from the authoritative teaching of her pastors, which informed her that she

should certainly rejoin her departed lover in a place of eternal bliss. For with her conviction of his almost superhuman excellencies, she could not doubt he was in heaven, if any heaven existed! She loved to subject her mind to the influences of ceremonial observance and solemnities, that she might more undoubtingly credit this beautiful vision of a futurity which was so amply to repay her sufferings in the dark isle of time. There was no asperity in Miss Dishnap's grief; she had no cause for any; she was not deserted, not maltreated by her lover; his dying thoughts and dying prayers were hers. She did not then well understand why Charity's sorrows were less curable than her own, but prescribed the same remedies as if to the same disease.

Whereas it was thus with Charity, that every word of doctrine which denounced the punishments of the wicked and the rewards of the good, deepened the isolation of her heart. Without the slightest tinge of ma-

lignant feeling in all her nature, still she felt that she was wronged, and that if ever she herself achieved the way to heaven, she could scarcely hope that the worldly, scheming, and heartless man she had loved, would be permitted to enter it too. This troubled her—she knew not well why, nor why she should still continue to grieve over his infidelity, and expect the news of his marriage as a calamity. Never more, indeed, could she be anything to him—but it troubled her.

However, she continued to accompany Miss Dishnap to her church with the same patient resignation with which she listened to the oft-repeated story of her youthful love, and heard the young surgeon's musical box (which he had left as a legacy to his betrothed) play through its string of Irish melodies a hundred times a day. There was one in especial of which he had been very fond, and Miss Dishnap set it so frequently to work, that Charity, with all her patience and sympathy, was very weary of it.

The industry by which she had calculated to earn her bread, meanwhile, yielded not very promising results. Without flattery, though we are a little partial to her, Charity's lace was wrought as finely as the finest of foreign fabric. She had a natural taste and elegance in it. But she was too conscientious to assure purchasers that it was made abroad, and consequently either it did not sell, or sold at inferior prices. Still, by living very moderately indeed (for she had scarcely enough to eat), she managed to fulfil her part of the contract. At least, she only fell into arrears twice in the first seven weeks—once to the extent of two shillings and threepence, and again, about sixpence halfpenny. These calculations may seem very trivial and unworthy of consideration to the reader, but they were matters of the deepest anxiety to Charity Green.

The benevolent old maid with whom she lived was very far from proving an exacting creditor; but she had too much delicacy

to wish to force an aid upon her young friend which she saw she was disinclined to accept; and a very narrow margin indeed remained to herself to be charitable upon, above her own necessities. It is no wonder, therefore, that the young lace-woman, half-starved and worked to death, and shut up in the close atmosphere of a bazaar, was looking anything but her best, when a visitor one day surprised her with his presence.

It was no less a personage than Mr. Bagshawe, the retired attorney. Charity beheld him long before he saw her, ferreting among the stalls, as if in search of something. She had not the vanity to think it could possibly be herself. She had scarcely ever thought of him, except to conclude that he had forgotten her, like the rest of her rich former friends. On the contrary, his sallow countenance really lighted up with pleasure when he recognised her; he even seemed affected. She looked much paler and thinner certainly, since his first obser-

vations were to that effect. He shook her hand with a kind of fervour, and with some agitation, explained that he had not been able to find out where she was, or she would have seen him much sooner. Her aunt and friends seemed ignorant of her place of retirement. Midas said she had gone into the country for the benefit of her health. He even expressed an opinion that she had a sweetheart where she was gone, whom she intended to marry! Mr. Bagshawe had only, accidentally, learned that morning from Alderman Gullibull where she was, and had hastened to pay his respects, and inquire if he could be of any service to her?

There was so much interest and kindness in the manner of this usually peevish and snappish valetudinary, that Charity was affected—affected even to tears. To hide these, she introduced Mr. Bagshawe to Miss Dishnap, with whom he speedily entered into conversation. Charity was rather surprised to observe how chatty and agreeable he could make himself when he chose; and

'e so skilfully extracted information about how and where they lived, without showing any indiscreet curiosity, that the soothing thought occurred to her that Mrs. Gullibull still took sufficient interest in her to send him for the purpose.

When Bagshawe had apparently ascertained as much as he deemed necessary on these points, he very politely asked if the ladies had dined? Now, Miss Dishnap had dined—that is to say, she had eaten half a cold mutton chop and some bread at one o'clock. And so had Charity dined, ostensibly—that is to say, she had gone out of the bazaar, eaten a penny roll, and came back trying to look as much as possible like a person that has dined. But Miss Dishnap's penetration was not so easily deceived, having had many a banyan day of her own in her time. She therefore took upon her, at a very slight stretch of conscience, to reply that Miss Green had not yet dined, but that there was a capital ordinary at one o'clock, kept at the very top of the building

for the use of the inhabitants, where, she supposed, she meant to dine.

"Then I'll go with her. You'll treat an old friend to a feed, won't you?" said Mr. Bagshawe. "And I suppose we have no time to lose, for it is half-past two now. The truth is, I don't know of a good eating-house in the neighbourhood, unless one went to the expense of an hotel—and that won't do these hard times."

The question being put in this manner, Charity felt she could not refuse, without much incivility, to give Mr. Bagshawe "a feed." She concluded, of course, that it was only a form for an invitation, and—and—if we must own the truth—she was hungry, and the prospect of a good dinner was not without its charms. The days of romance are indeed completely over in all matters relating to the stomach, but we hope we rather enhance than diminish Charity's claim on the respect of the reader when we acknowledge she was subject to every human infirmity, and among the rest

to a good appetite. The more honour, therefore, to her that she preferred to starve independently and with spirit, than to flourish in plenty at the price of degradation in feeling and loss of self-respect!

Miss Dishnap engaged to take care of her friend's part of the stall till she returned, which was a reciprocal custom of great mutual convenience, established ever since they had fraternised, or *sororised*, to coin a proper feminine word for the occasion. Accordingly, Charity and Mr. Bagshawe ascended to the spacious loft which served the bazaar for an eating house, the latter very kindly tendering his arm to escort her. Charity, with her usual simplicity of kindness, pointed out whatever she thought might interest him. She showed him a wonderful exhibition through magnifying glasses, belonging to an ingenious Frenchman who had obtained the sobriquet in the bazaar of "Don Felix," from his gay mercurial brightness of character. Charity was greatly pleased

to be able to astonish Mr. Bagshawe with intelligence, that, what he took to be some vast unknown species of lobster, was in reality merely a magnified flea! "The whole world looks through glasses like these, sometimes," said Mr. Bagshawe, with a smile that had in it but little of its accustomed cynical bitterness of expression.

The eating-room of the bazaar was a most extensive apartment, almost as large as the entire roof of the building, for it was not divided by partitions. The walls were simply bare bricks whitewashed; and numerous wooden tables, with benches, accommodated the guests. The principal dinner-hour was now passed, and there were but very few guests in the apartment. But Mr. Bagshawe seemed not desirous of cultivating any intimacy with this scattered remnant. Under pretence that the smell of the hot meats made him faint, he drew a table and bench to a remote window in the chamber, and thence issued his orders

to the waiter. He desired him to furnish the best viands in readiness, and even startled the official by inquiring if he had any champagne! Bottled ale was, however, the utmost the cellars of that vast garret afforded. But Mr. Bagshawe declared he should be sure to be ill, if he had not at least one glass of sherry to his meal, and bribed the waiter to go for a bottle of the best to some neighbouring tavern.

Charity was somewhat surprised at all this. She had a dim idea, it is true, that she was rather a favourite with the old gentleman, but thought she was so on account of her connexion with the Gullibulls. And now that she was turned out, and repudiated by the entire family! it puzzled her. Meanwhile the roast beef, though stewed as well as roasted on the stoves, and the Yorkshire pudding, were very appetizing. The unexpected kindness and notice taken of her elevated her spirits. She had not tasted wine for a long time, and the glass of sherry which Bagshawe insisted on her

drinking at once warmed her heart, and kindled a very fanciful idea in her head. Had Midas repented of his unjustifiable desertion, and sent his godfather to mediate a reconciliation?

Mr. Bagshawe seemed at least to enjoy his companion's appetite, though he himself ate more than he usually considered good, in his weak state of health, unless of the most inviting viands. But Charity's hopes were destined to be speedily dispelled.

"Well, Chary," he said, with a smile, "I am glad to see you are in good health, and that you enjoy your independent life so much! I am pleased with myself for having had something to do in it. You remember it was I told you about that letter which my godson squeezed into Mrs. Sparkleton's hand? I knew you would not like that; so I told it you on purpose."

Charity was much more surprised than delighted with this abrupt intimation; she had no idea that Mr. Bagshawe suspected there was more than the ordinary con-

nexion of their relationship between herself and Midas.

"I don't know what you should think I had to do with that, sir?" she said, with a strange quivering of hope and fear which scarcely pleased Mr. Bagshawe.

"Nonsense!" he replied, with his customary snappishness. "Don't try that dodge on me! I am too old a stager. I used to see him courting you, in his way, on the sly—and so much on the sly, that I saw he was a humbug. I have watched him from his childhood: I am not to be deceived: Beside, I am a bilious old wretch, and suspect everybody. I made him write you that promise, by telling him I had discovered his secret, and that I should be seriously offended if he did not at once show that his views were honourable. I don't like flirtations between people that live in the same house. I promised to break the matter to his father, too—and I can't but think, now,—against your kind lover's will, for he never claimed my promise—just the

contrary. He was always giving me reasons for delay. I don't like long engagements—they always end in nothing, or worse. But, to tell you the truth, I was in no hurry to push the matter on myself. I did not think a girl of your kindness and generosity of disposition could have been happy with such a fellow. Still you were the best judge, I thought. However, at last it exceeded my patience, especially when I saw that he was courting another woman—that shining piece of gossamer, Mrs. Sparkleton! And now he tells me, you never had any sincere affection for him; that it was only for his money—that your temper is intolerably bad—that you are consumptive, and I don't know what all!—This beats me; I didn't think you were so much after money! But now, if you do want his money, and not himself, I can put you in a way to get it, and will. That's what I came to say!"

And Mr. Bagshawe swallowed a second glass of sherry with violence.

"I do not want his money, sir," said Charity, quite aghast, and resigning the momentary complexion lent her by excitement. "I do not want his money—nor himself. I have told him so."

"Don't keep secrets with me, Chary! I appoint myself your legal adviser—your attorney—and I care a great deal more for you than for my godson," said Mr. Bagshawe, with warmth. "In fact, I have despised him from his cradle; he was a curmudgeon when a baby. I shall honour you if you have the spirit to take your revenge!—and if you'll bring your action against him, I'll be at all the expense of the prosecution, and will wager all I possess you recover seven or eight hundred pounds!—Don't answer in a hurry. We'll have some strawberries with our wine. It's a nice, cooling fruit."

Charity's distress of mind at this unexpected proposal was very evident; but she tried to answer calmly. "I do not know, sir, why you should come to me with

such an offer. I refused three hundred pounds, which he offered me himself. I am not in want of money—and if I were starving, I would not take his."

"I hope you are not in want of money indeed, or who is to pay for our dinner and sherry?" said Mr. Bagshawe, with a grim smile. "But I didn't know you were in a condition to refuse eight hundred pounds? Do you really do such a flourishing business down below?—I'll bet any money now you don't have a dinner every day?—I don't say a good one, for that is impossible in this place—but any dinner at all?"

"Mr. Bagshawe!—I thought you came as a friend, and not to insult my poverty!" said Charity, with thick-gushing tears.

"And so I do, my dear girl! But it is fit you should take some revenge on the fellow. Come, you are not altogether made of milk. You can only reach him through his money — he cares for nothing else in reality. He means to marry Mrs. Sparkle-

ton, if he can get her. Perhaps he can't, but that's no merit of his; so you owe him no forbearance. You can't lose anything, because, as I said, I will be at all the expense. I'll find you lawyers, money, and everything! or rather money will find you everything. It will buy everything that is worth having in this world!"

"Why, sir," said Charity, with great earnestness, entirely neglecting the main point, so far as regarded herself in this dissertation, "I thought you were very fond of him?"

"I fond of him!—Pho, how could I be fond of him? I'll defy his own mother to be so!—Chary," continued Mr. Bagshawe, with special vehemence, "I don't believe you were ever fond of him yourself. I know women always fancy they are in love, if a man pays them any little attention—especially if he's the first. But I don't believe you ever cared much for him! Now did you?"

"I—I don't care so much for him as I did!" said Charity, with hesitation. "I

don't desire or intend ever to see him again. But that is of no consequence to any one but myself."

"There you are mistaken! You really are!" said Mr. Bagshawe, eagerly. "I don't mind if I mention, that if ever I cared for Midas at all, it was on your account. I care for *you* a very great deal! I did not know how much, until I lost sight of you the other day, and thought it might be for ever! I should not even like to die unless you were somewhere near me! You have such a soft hand and a gentle voice! I want some one to close my eyes gently, and to be sorry when I am gone—and not to let them break my knees to make me a shapely corpse!"

"Oh," said Charity, surprised at the vehemence with which he spoke, and the colour which flushed his pale complexion, "Oh, why should you talk so! You look less like dying than ever, sir!"

"Well, Chary, I do believe—I begin to believe, that is,—after all, my dis-

ease of the heart may be only what they tell me it is, a disordered digestion!" he replied, with increasing energy. "Above all things they recommend me cheerful society—but I can't find any. Those that pretend to be so are only drunk, or foolish, or laughing at something that don't seem at all funny to me. I want some one to make me a cheerful home. I've tried house-keepers. They don't do. They never understand what one wants. I want a wife, I think! Midas has behaved to you shamefully—but you won't bring your action. You can't live on air! And—if you'll marry me—you will have no occasion! I have 17,000*l.* in the funds—and I'll marry you, if you'll marry me!"

Mr. Bagshawe was silent, and as confused and agitated as if he had asked leave to eat the young girl instead of to marry her. And Charity was so utterly amazed that she could not believe in the information of her senses, and stared with incredulous astonishment at the retired attorney.

"I don't see, sir," she faltered out at last, "I don't see why you should make such a joke of me! I don't deserve it!"

"Upon my life and honour, there is no joke at all in the matter!" replied Mr. Bagshawe, resuming energy. "I really am not such a hard old stick as people suppose. I marked you all along, Chary; and though you were such a quiet, submissive victim, I always saw that you had mind and heart far superior to your tormentors. But I knew I was an old fellow, and I thought you would be happier perhaps with a young one. But which is truepins after all? Yes, I would have left you my property, if you had married Midas: I won't leave him a single shilling as it is!"

"Oh, Mr. Bagshawe, I hope you are not in earnest!—after feeding him so long with expectations!" remonstrated Charity.

"Pray, how long did he feed you? And it was on your account I fed him," replied Mr. Bagshawe. "I'm quite in earnest, I assure you! He came to me this morning

and wanted me to lend his father four thousand pounds—to pay up some railway calls, I suppose. But I know better! I told him to lend them to his father himself; for he has seven thousand pounds of his own. I know that, for I examined the titles of a mortgage he lent it on. I did it gratis. That's why he employed me. And then he had the impudence to tell me he could not, as he should be at such an expense in his marriage with this Mrs. Sparkleton—which is to come off directly. But I set up my back firmly, for I have already lent the alderman 2,300*l.* merely on an I.O.U. (that bears no interest, you know.) The son don't know of that—but I know that if his father has confessed to any degree of embarrassment to him, there is a great deal more under the rose. Then as to his use for his own money, I told him he should marry a cheaper wife—that he should have kept his word with you. And then he abused you so that I got out of all patience, and told him plainly he was a scamp, and that

I would not lend his father a farthing while he himself had anything to lend!"

"Abused me?" said Charity, with quick-falling tears. "What could he say against me? The worst he knows of me is, that I had once the folly to love him."

"Pooh! you never loved him; you only fancied you did; and the best revenge you can take is to take me!" said Mr. Bagshawe, with an earnestness which did not allow Charity any longer to imagine him in jest. "I have seventeen thousand pounds in the funds, besides other little things—and if you will marry me, it shall be all yours. I'll settle it all upon you when I die; for there is no one in the whole world, friends and relations all of a lump, I love or like but you! Come—say the word! I'll get a licence directly—and that will vex him every way!"

When people that are naturally cold get warm, they are almost certain to blaze.

"But I do not want to vex him, sir," said Charity, equally vexed and confused. "I do not intend ever to marry any one."

"Don't talk such nonsense! You can't intend to be a nun or a dreary old maid!" returned Mr. Bagshawe. "And how are you to live? You will soon get tired of sewing samplers for bread! It's all very well for amusement. Now, if you'll marry me, I'll take such a pretty cottage for you—say, at Dulwich—with a garden and everything, and the walks all done round with pretty cockleshells. I'll never tease you to learn French and play the piano. You are accomplished enough for me; and I used to like your queer bird-like singing when you were not thinking anybody heard you, far better than any of their grand fal-de-rals of operas. Look here!—I prefer you a million times to Mrs. Sparkleton! It is not every one would say that. And you shall have the old lady you keep the stall with, to live with you. She shall have fifty pounds a year, and live with you like a lady. And if you consent, I don't want you to bring your action against Midas. Let him marry whom he pleases—I shall have the better bargain, if he married

Helen of Troy—for I should have a true and affectionate heart to love me!"

Charity was struck dumb with mingled pain and admiration at this generous proffer. She had tasted poverty—the offer was most advantageous in every worldly sense. She was without protection — a friendless orphan, almost alone in the world. She had always experienced kindness and attention from Mr. Bagshawe. It would certainly be a complete revenge on Midas, to marry his godfather, and inherit the wealth he had so securely calculated on. But she felt that she could not be the wife of another, conscientiously; her heart was smitten to the core, and the wound had only closed on the surface. We are not quite sure that the pale and meagre aspect of her new admirer did not rather assist in forming her disinterested resolve. But certain we are that she very modestly and gratefully, but with a decision that Bagshawe had never yet observed in her manner, declined the offer.

Mr. Bagshawe, however, was not so much discouraged with this first negative as Charity expected. She had so much reluctance naturally to offend, or hurt the feelings of any one, that perhaps she made her rejoinder too gratefully, too modestly. He told her he would give her time to consider,—to consult her friend, Miss Dishnap. "And be sure and tell her that you will make a home for her as long as she lives, if she takes my side of the question. But you may tell her, too, if you like, that if you will not marry me, you are worth eight hundred pounds any day you like to enter your action. Or, stay,—I'll enter it for you; I am out of all patience; I'll set about it at once."

"You cannot, sir—it will be of no use; I have surrendered to him all my papers and proofs of every sort," said Charity, sedately.

"You have!—you soft-cake,—you!—you ——but, no; you are not a fool, because I know you will marry me some day! But

how could you be so simple?" exclaimed the retired attorney. "What an excellent case! what fine damages! cast to the winds."

He would have ejaculated much more, but as little expressive of approbation at her proceedings, if Miss Dishnap, surprised at her friend's long delay, had not made her appearance to inquire the reason. Bagshawe's arrival had apparently brought some luck, for Miss Dishnap handed over to Charity a couple of sovereigns for a lace veil she had just sold, apologising for her intrusion. Charity could not forbear holding them out to Mr. Bagshawe, and inquiring, with a flush of honest pride, whether he thought now that she was likely to starve?

"You owe nearly one of them for our dinner; Miss Dishnap, I call you to witness she promised me a treat," said Bagshawe, abruptly clenching Charity's hand, as if to take the coin from it. "Miss Dishnap, she might have seventeen thousand of these things, if she would. I am an attorney,

and I am going to compromise myself—I will tell you how."

The dining-rooms were now entirely deserted, save by one or two attendants, who were busied in washing dishes in the scullery. Mr. Bagshawe accordingly found himself at liberty to endeavour to enlist Miss Dishnap in his favour; which he did in a very eloquent harangue on the advantages of the match he proposed. At least she listened with the greatest gravity and attention; but with regard to the proposition relating to herself, she declared that although she should prefer Miss Green's company to any other, she had determined never to relinquish an independent position. She had suffered too much, she said, with a sigh, from listening to good advice about the necessity of having a good income to live on, and a good house to live in, to desire either. This gave Charity courage to repeat her negative; and finally, Mr. Bagshawe went off, in high dudgeon apparently, and leaving

Charity in some doubt whether he had not intended to make her a wedding portion of damages before he married her. He even paid for the dinner out of one of her sovereigns, and wrapped up the change he gave her in a bit of paper, with a satirical smile, before he retired. It is true that Charity found the wrapper to be a bank-note for fifty pounds; but she took care to restore it to him by post the same evening.

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Sparkleton grew daily more and more embarrassed in her affairs, personal and pecuniary. Even those patient and much-enduring animals, tradesmen, began to get importunate. Mrs. Sparkleton had repeatedly borrowed money to discharge her dressmaker's bill; but somehow or other, something always came in the way, and diverted the dedicated sums to different uses. A new equipage, a bracelet set in some particularly "sweet" manner, a stock of rare plants for her greenhouse—anything, almost, was sufficient to claim priority of attention to the claims of mere justice or prudence. She was also very

often generous, in preference to exercising either of the above virtues; for Mrs. Sparkleton put little value on money, excepting when she wanted it. Any begging-letter impostor who could write at all affectingly, might almost calculate on a sovereign in reply, unless she happened to forget the application between receiving and granting it. But now even her milliner—a polished Parisian, quite aware of the rudeness of asking to be paid at all—wrote her pretty sharp dunning notes, every time she sent to order a bonnet, or any other little necessary.

Mrs. Sparkleton also began to feel herself entangled in a more dangerous position with her friend's husband, than she had speculated upon when she commenced the divertisement. She had intended (we believe) to amuse herself and vex Lady Fitzhauton, but not to get herself into a scrape—not to compromise herself. More powerful passions had, however, come into play, than had been at first invoked, or than it became

a woman of fashion, moving in the best society, to feel. It is quite a mistake to imagine that passions perish in those high spheres, like flames in the chill atmospheres above our own. There is a good deal of human feeling remaining among well-bred people, in spite of every effort of education, and the frowns of society. A light flirtation and rivalry had deepened into love and jealousy, and Mrs. Sparkleton daily found Lord Fitzhauton's importunities and passion become more dangerous, because she herself shared the feelings she had kindled.

He was dangerous in another sense too. His haughty and self-willed disposition made him almost as careless of appearances, as Mrs. Sparkleton was studious of them. He really neglected his wife indecorously; not in the usual way, but so markedly, that it is no great wonder the soothing attentions of Lord Deville became quite necessary to her comfort. Mrs. Sparkleton, on the contrary, was obliged repeatedly to remonstrate with him on the excess of his polite-

ness to herself. He haunted her in the Parks; he was always in her Opera-box; he would dance with nobody else; she was alarmed to hear that she was always his toast at men parties. He was always sneering at Midas, and playing at cross purposes with him, so that the original dislike between them had ripened into a very passable hatred for an age of white waistcoats, which neither loves nor hates with the good old fervour eulogised by that rough old moralist, Dr. Johnson. With Lord Deville he had also grown very cold and distant. Lady Fitzhauton flattered herself—and did everything to confirm the notion—that it was because he perceived his lordship was dotingly in love with her. But Fitzhauton did not believe in that at all. A blinder passion persuaded him—and certainly Deville did what he could to confirm the impression, whenever he had an opportunity—that the latter had now applied himself in real earnest to win Mrs. Sparkleton. It seemed so natural and feasible an

alliance, that Fitzhauton could not persuade himself there was no fear of its happening, especially as Mrs. Sparkleton continued to distract the public attention, by showing the viscount marks of what diplomatists call, in their cautious way, the highest consideration.

On the other hand, the military peer had engaged Mrs. Sparkleton in a private correspondence—which, judiciously managed, soon becomes a *secret* one. She was obliged to remonstrate with him not unfrequently on his behaviour to her in public, which threatened to compromise her. And although she very virtuously refused, at first, to receive any private communication from Fitzhauton, she could not refuse to receive the apologies and promises he returned to her own little complaining billets. It was necessary to write, because she thought she could rate him more severely with her pen than with her tongue. Her eyes always took her antagonist's part in a personal controversy, and the correspondence began most deco-

rously. Mrs. Sparkleton wrote in a great passion, to tell his lordship that if he persisted in leaving his wife's box and coming round to hers the moment she appeared, she should be obliged to give up the theatre altogether. The first interchange of epistles began with "My lord," and "Dear Mrs. Sparkleton;" and, after passing through all proper gradations, landed in "My dear Fitzhauton," and "My dearest Geraldine." Remonstrance and blame — apologies and complaints — had gradually changed into passionate entreaties, attractive denials, lamentations against destiny, wild hopes, and despairs, projects, and abandonments of the same, promises, plights—and, finally, a confession of mutual and passionate love, which Mrs. Sparkleton, with great solemnity, declared must continue hopeless, but acknowledged could only cease with their mutual existence!

After this avowal, extorted amidst the gaiety and intoxication of flowers and music and passion at a ball where Lady

Fitzhauton danced all her partners out, including even Viscount Deville, who danced so equably, that very rarely indeed was *he* to be fatigued with the exercise: after this avowal, we say, Mrs. Sparkleton felt the absolute necessity of shunning farther intercourse with the impetuous lover who had won it from her—only she could not prevail on herself to do so. Love and vanity would not suffer it, not to mention jealousy, that firmly interposed her veto, representing that Lady Fitzhauton might possibly be reinstated, by too much coldness on her rival's part, in all her rights as a wife.

Yet Mrs. Sparkleton was sitting at breakfast, on a certain morning towards the close of the season, with a billet from Lord Fitzhauton lying unopened on the table. Matters of more pressing import absorbed her attention. She was trying to make out the meaning of the Railway Share List, which was open in her hand. Lawless had only just gone away, in his barouche, and he had been to show to Mrs.

Sparkleton how a sudden and most unexpected decline in the price of shares rendered it more than ever unadvisable to sell out; while the alderman was in such want of ready money to complete his great operation in the grain market, that he was obliged to request her to provide the means to meet the first little batch of their accommodation-bills. Those were the two months' set, and quite easily met—only about fifteen hundred pounds or so.

In spite of all the smooth plausibility of the factotum, and his "easiest thing of a hundred," Mrs. Sparkleton was exceedingly vexed, and very plainly informed him that it was quite impossible. She would sign as much more paper as he liked, but she really could not furnish any more ready money—it was quite impossible. No one would lend it to her! She had exhausted all her means of borrowing, and was *perhaps* really involving herself in a disagreeable manner! Lawless gave a grim smile; but with great delicacy informed her that, from some inex-

plicable cause, a degree of distrust had come over the money-market, and the dealers would no longer negotiate even the most approved bills. Alderman Gullibull's and her own must be considered unquestionably in that class, yet he had run over the whole city, on the day before, in vain, to get money to meet the bills immediately due, to spare the necessity of troubling her.

The worthy factotum then suggested whether it would not be easy for her to borrow a few hundreds of some of her fashionable acquaintances? Lord Deville was a man of large property.

"Why don't he borrow of his own daughter? She must have money; she is always boasting of the immense fortune she brought with her!" said Mrs. Sparkleton, impatiently. "But do you really think I will put myself under an obligation of the kind to a man who—they tell me—has pretensions which I do not encourage?"

"Oh, mem! relations are the worst people

in the world to apply to when you are in difficulties! And I don't believe the Fitzhautons are very well off themselves—so very extravagant!—I saw her ladyship this morning in the Park with a pair of new horses—no, one was a mare—both bloods—and she was whipping the off-hand one like a little fury! And do you know what the groom told me? quite unknown to his lordship, she has had his fine mare, which he called after you, ma'am,—put in harness. It looks as if they were coming down when they can't afford to buy fresh horses whenever they want them—and so the groom made the remark, when I was treating him at the Bunch of Grapes—for he has put me up to a lot of secrets about horses, and something for something is always my maxim!"

"She can afford another very well, Mr. Lawless, but she wants to spoil the creature's splendid action in the saddle!—I'll tell Lord Fitzhauton! She shall *not* do it!" said Mrs. Sparkleton, with a vehemence

very unusual in her perfectly ladylike system of manners. "And so, once for all, sir, if she will not lend her father a small portion of the large fortune he gilded her with so thoroughly, I don't see why I should,—and I will not."

"It would look like taking a gift back—and what is so free as a gift, ma'am?" remonstrated the negotiator. "Besides, it wouldn't be just, as they are not to share in the profits of the speculation—and we ought to keep them for the last. Besides, relations are of no use, as I said before. There's his own son—I mean, Mr. Midas Gullibull—positively refuses to get his money out of a mortgage he has, to lend it to his own parent—although he must see the necessity—at least, he ought, if he has eyes. He has seven thousand pounds, and won't lend them!"

"I would not mind borrowing of *him*," said Mrs. Sparkleton, yet with hesitation. "His father could pay him for me."

"But he will be sure to want security,"

said Lawless, shaking his head mournfully.

"Well, I'll promise him Longacres—he don't know how it is involved," replied Mrs. Sparkleton.

"But he will want the title-deeds in his possession—and Mrs. Skinflintz has them, hasn't she?" said Lawless. "He's not a fellow to be easily taken in, and gammoned with fine words."

"I have some little influence with him—perhaps he might dispense with such strictness of legality with me," replied the lady. "I believe he would even be glad to oblige me, and I could easily persuade him that my title-deeds are at my agent's in the country, and that I only want the money for a temporary purpose—which I do, you know. Fifteen hundred will do, will it not?"

"We had better make a good dip while we are about it—as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb," replied the factotum. "Gammon him that the colonel left some sort of a charge on the property, which you

have an opportunity of buying off advantageously at this moment? You will want at least four thousand pounds for that. But it won't quite do, neither, to say that; it will prepossess him against the property, to find it has any charges at all upon it. Tell him you want to buy the next place to it—isn't there some place to sell in the neighbourhood? I know there must be—in an improving place like that, there must be. Say you are tired of railways and mean to buy land instead, and want four thousand pounds to put with five or six of your own to make a first-rate solid investment."

Alas, poor Midas!—Mrs. Sparkleton did not at all like the idea of owing anything to him; in fact, though she seemed to assent, Lawless left her in a very unpleasant revery indeed, striving, as we have said, to understand the share list of the day.

In the first place Mrs. Sparkleton felt it a grievance to be obliged to think at all. She was not accustomed to the process, and it wearied her. "It is really very odd to

have so much that one can't get anything," she mused. "And what a shame it is one can't even be ruined intelligibly! What am I to understand by learning that the Middle Diddle were 'done as low yesterday as 143¾?' However, it is pretty plain it means that one is not worth so much as one was the day before."

She then bethought herself, and with little satisfaction, that if things continued to go wrong in her speculations, she might, after all, be forced to marry Midas Gullibull! How else could she pay her debts? She, whose chief quarrel with Fitzhauton was that he had married for money, might very possibly do exactly the same thing! But her eye wandered at the moment to the table, and she threw down the newspaper to take up the billet.

It was exceedingly well written. Passion inspires even dull persons, and Lord Fitzhauton was not of that numerous classification in the *genus homo*. It complained very bitterly of her recent severity and

reserve to him; declared that she was utterly mistaken in her opinion of his motives, but that she gave him no opportunity to express the purity of the passion which had taken entire possession of all his thoughts and faculties! Would she but grant him a few moments of private interview to utter the emotions of his heart in some spot where impertinent misconstruction could not attend on the most innocent actions—he should be able to convince her how groundless were her fears—how undue her reproaches.

A thought came into Mrs. Sparkleton's head as she dried the tears which undeniably glistened in her eyes over this epistle, coupling its moving contents with her apprehensions of being compelled to seek a husband in Midas—which brought the colour to her brow, although alone. This is alone sufficient to refute the notion that women only blush in company, to brighten their complexions. Then she thought the safest way to escape from her perplexities would

be to go abroad. But how could she manage that without a supply of money; and her affairs were involved in a mass of accounts and railway transactions of which only Alderman Gullibull and his factotum possessed the key. Of a sudden it occurred to her that she would go and consult the great man himself as to the most feasible means of extrication. Then she would sell off—then she would go to the continent—then she would be at peace—but here she suddenly recollected a sneer which Lady Fitzhauton had ventured to pass upon her head-dress a short time before.

Yes, Lady Fitzhauton had dared to make what she called "a good cut" at Mrs. Sparkleton, as she had learned from Mrs. Clackmannan, who learned it from Mrs. Brahazon's own lips, who heard it with her own ears! "Look at Mrs. Sparkleton's scarlet head-dress!—as if men were like turkey-cocks, and flew at that colour!"

At this moment there was a rap at the door. A single and decisive one, but not a

postman's. Already Mrs. Sparkleton had learned to dread the rap of a dun, and she started — not without a cause! In contravention to orders expressly given, and not usually disobeyed by *femmes de chambre* of discretion, Mademoiselle Florine introduced to her mistress's presence, without waiting permission, Madame Millefleurs, a celebrated modiste. A strange sign, that, when servants who are well bred, so far violate propriety as to let a creditor in!

Madame Millefleurs was naturally a woman of the most polite and agreeable manners,—even too polite and too agreeable. These accomplishments she carried to what would have been styled cringing and flattery by uneducated people. But something had corrupted her *bon naturel*—had soured the sweetness of her temper. Her bussel tossed about her like a balloon in a passion; her dissipated, worn French face, usually all-beaming with amiable smiles, was now all curdled with frowns that reversed the adjective.

"Madame, *excusez-moi!* I feel myself *maltraitée!* I arrive—never am I permitted to enter, Madame! What for is the reason? I inform her I bring a new pattern for Madame's inspection. I have none!—But I bring my *leetle beel*, and she—I insist—I *inseest*—she shall pay it! I will wait no more!"

"What do I owe you?" said Mrs. Sparkleton, passionately. "I will pay it this instant; but you shall never have a single shilling again from me; and I will tell all the women of my acquaintance how shamefully you have behaved to me!"

"Ah, I tell you, you would ruin yourself, Madame Millefleurs! I tell you, you will lose de great marriage bill; but you do not listen to me!" exclaimed Florine, drying her eyes, though not at all wet, in her little muslin apron.

"But, madame!—I am owed so much I cannot pay," said the modiste, visibly surprised and cooling down. "Behold!—ten hundred and one twenty and two pound! How am I to pay if nobody pay me?"

"Don't pay!—of course you can't, till you get money," said Mrs. Sparkleton. "Every one knows I am to get married soon to a very rich man, I believe; can't you wait till then?"

"Twenty millions francs! Ah, you cannot believe!—Il n'y a rien de si incroyable que la vérité!" exclaimed Florine.

"I know dat! But how can I wait! Let Madame marry! What for she do not marry?" returned Millefleurs. "I say I will not wait any more! What for? Is dere too much in my beel? I *will* have my money!"

"So you shall, so you ought—but not directly," said Mrs. Sparkleton. "I really can't, and that's the end of the matter—so don't bore me, but leave the house."

Mrs. Sparkleton was in a passion, had started up, and in her gesture of command looked a duke's granddaughter every inch. But she did not imagine herself to have so distinguished an audience as she certainly had—in the person of Lord Fitzhauton,

who had glided quietly into the room. Of late he had often entered without being formally announced—one of the privileges of intimate friendship. Still less did Mrs. Sparkleton calculate on Madame Millefleurs' repartee—which consisted in the production of a legal-looking piece of parchment, properly signed and attested.

"Den look—see! One copie of one writ! —Madame pays or she goes to prison!— You are testimony, Mademoiselle Florine!"

Mrs. Sparkleton turned extremely pale, but was almost unconsciously extending her hand to take the fatal document, when Lord Fitzhauton interposed. "What the devil's the row here?" he said, snatching it away, and with eyes that brightened suddenly from anger to laughing recognition, as he encountered those of Madame Millefleurs, he added, "What, Madame la Franche! my old Parisian acquaintance! *Comment vous portez vous, ma chère?*"

"*A merveille!* but I am not Madame la Franche; I am Madame Millefleurs, *mo-*

diste, de *grande modiste*, Madame Millefleurs!"

"Nay, come, I am sure you are yourself!—you kept a *magasin* in the Rue de Rivoli! It has exploded, I suppose?" exclaimed Lord Fitzhauton, laughing outright.

"No, milor, I am no!—I assure you on my *honneur!*" said Madame Millefleurs, with vehemence.

"Your *honneur!* — What next?" said Fitzhauton. "But you ought to know best, and since you have cut the acquaintance with Madame La Franche, I have no objection to do so!"

"Ah, milor, I beseech you; consider, what shall I do? In dis country, what can I do without a character? Do not confound me with Madame La Franche, who I never know at all in my own country!"

"Well, I am mistaken, I suppose," said his lordship, good-humouredly. "But what's this stuff?—What, have you had

the confounded impudence to serve a copy of a writ on Mrs. Sparkleton?" And he tore it into a thousand pieces.

"It's only for a few hundred pounds, which I did not at this moment happen to have in readiness, dear Fitzhauton!" said Mrs. Sparkleton, with an inexpressible sense of relief and protection. And never, indeed, had Fitzhauton been so dear to her as at this moment.

"But I demand it now not at all!—I would not offend Madame for all de world!" exclaimed the penitent modiste.

"If you wanted money, Geraldine, *dearest*, why *did* you not apply to me?" said Lord Fitzhauton, in a tone of tender reproach. "I shall have some money in a few days—where is the bill?—I'll pay it. Suffer me to do so as a great favour—you can't tell how you will oblige me! Let her have her account in readiness next Thursday, and you and I will meet at her house to examine the items and discharge it. My word will do, mean-

while, won't it, Millefleurs—since that is your name at present?"

Mrs. Sparkleton coloured deeply, but after a moment's pause, nodded assent, and the delighted modiste curtsied almost to the ground. Then uttering a thousand protests against any possible supposition that she had ever dreamed of offending Madame, she suffered herself to be escorted out by Florine.

In spite of the service he had so recently rendered, Lord Fitzhauton had then the mortification to discover that he had offended Mrs. Sparkleton mortally! She declared she would not receive the loan of a single shilling, for any purpose, from him; that she would not meet him at Madame Millefleurs for any purpose on earth; that she would send instant orders to her agent's to "sell out her stock," at whatever sacrifice, and go abroad! She said she was the most insulted of women, and wept very bitterly. Lord Fitzhauton, on his part, went into a passion on the integrity and purity of his

motives—repelled insinuations with indignation, until, finally, they had a really vehement quarrel, which concluded with a mutual and irrevocable determination never to meet again, *except in society*—and in his lordship's abrupt departure.

CHAPTER III.

We do not exactly know why Mrs. Sparkleton ordered her carriage in about an hour after this final interview, to proceed to Fitzhauton house. Perhaps she believed what his lordship assured her in a passion he would do, when they parted—"He would go home and make friends with his stupid wife!—anything rather than be made such cruel sport of by a woman who evidently delighted in his misery!"

But Fitzhauton had not done anything so rash as this. Mrs. Sparkleton found her ladyship quite alone, and really quite delighted and eager to see her! Of late, this was not by any means the rule, and Mrs.

Sparkleton had securely calculated that if alone, her ladyship would not be at home, to *her*. But at home she was, and, with considerable unwillingness, Mrs. Sparkleton mounted to a *tête-à-tête*.

Lady Fitzhauton's eyes were sparkling with as much triumph and malice as if she had just achieved some great result. She received Mrs. Sparkleton with the utmost cordiality, for she imagined she had it now in her power to wound the feelings and vanity of her visitor pretty severely.

"I want your advice, dear Mrs. Sparkleton; indeed, it concerns yourself in some degree; for, although you will not have Lord Deville, I think it very affronting to you that he still pretends to court you," she said, taking a letter from under a handkerchief, where it had been a little hastily thrown. "He was not at your *Thé dansant*, was he, last night?"

"There was such a mob, that I scarcely recollect—yes, I think he was," replied Mrs. Sparkleton, with excessive unconcern.

"He *could* not be! He promised me,—I mean, he told me—he would not!" replied Lady Fitzhauton, warmly. "That is, he said he should not have time, though you sent him so kind an invitation. He lunched with me yesterday. And what do you think? I never in the least suspected it—but the poor foolish man has actually fallen in love with me!"

"With you!—Why, my dear soul, it is quite impossible; you are a married woman, and must not misunderstand people so strangely," said Mrs. Sparkleton, amazed at this revelation. "Really, you will make yourself quite ridiculous if you take the light *persiflage* of society in such serious lights."

"Oh, I understand *persiflage* as well as anybody else—I hear quite enough of that—men making fun of women, by pretending to be in love with them," replied Lady Fitzhauton, with a most provokingly contemptuous expression. "Fitzhauton himself often makes fools of women in that way,

to vex me—but I am not vexed at all! Look at this letter—only you must promise me to keep it an eternal secret!"

"Letter! has he committed himself to black and white?" thought Mrs. Sparkleton, with much surprise, as she took an epistle from Lady Fitzhauton. With increasing amazement, she recognised Deville's handwriting, though a pretty good effort had been made to disguise it, and it was without signature.

"Nothing—I own it, dearest perfection!" —read Mrs. Sparkleton, "nothing but the extreme violence of my passion could excuse the rash avowal I have dared to make! But are you not neglected—despised—probably *betrayed?* Who can see so sweet a flower thrown aside, and not stoop to put it in his bosom? And is a love so pure, so fervent, to be abandoned to a perpetual despair? Are we bound to keep faith so merciless to the faithless? Faithless I believe *him* to be—you will know who I mean. And yet after so much that I know—so much more

that I suspect—you think it possible—you accuse me of a wish to obtain the hand of a woman whose heart is contaminated by an impure affection for the husband of another? You will know to whom I allude;—or rather a woman who has *no* heart, but who employs all the artifices of a shameless coquetry to win one which should never be hers, and is besides not worth the having!

"Pardon me if I speak bitter truths. I implore your pardon! Let me purchase it with the silent devotion of my life! If you need revenge, look in my heart!—you will ask no more. But let me hope you will not refuse—as in a moment of anger you so cruelly threatened—to accompany the unworthy man who possesses you to my breakfast on Saturday! I do assure you, my strawberries are the finest this year ever seen, and you will witness a little fête, in the French style, which will possess some charm of novelty to you. In secret, dearest one, and with every mark of open homage which prudence will permit me to bestow,

you shall be the queen of the gala, as you are of the heart of him who pens these lines, inspired by it."

We do not know that there was ever any woman who felt more particularly insulted and exasperated than Mrs. Sparkleton was by the contents of this letter. But she took care not to let her antagonist perceive it, though with some difficulty.

"Why, surely some one has copied this thing out of an antiquated novel!—you don't really mean to say, Lady Fitzhauton, that you received this letter, by a modern postman?" she exclaimed.

"Half-an-hour ago!—Don't you know the handwriting?" replied her ladyship.

"No, nor can I even guess at it."

"You *must* know; it is Lord Deville's," said Lady Fitzhauton, triumphantly. "Nobody but he could write to me about what he mentions, for he does offend me by making love to me. And I mean to tell Fitzhauton, that he may perceive I am not so unnoticeable a person as he seems to

think I am—and, besides, I want to know what woman is after him; for I will expose her everywhere, for a wretch as she is!"

By what admirable management did Mrs. Sparkleton keep both her countenance and her temper at these words? Only the most finished education could have enabled her to do so. Lady Fitzhauton would have been almost at fisticuffs in a similar position.

"Oh, I suppose *she* will not care for that, if she is a woman of a certain character—and of course nobody else would encourage the attentions of a married man," she said. "But I really don't advise you to do it. You are far more likely to force Lord Fitzhauton wholly into the power of the person—whoever she is—than to recal him to yourself, by violence! If she is a woman of spirit, you will only make her desperate. And, then, Lord Fitzhauton will be sure to suspect that something rather out of the usual way must have passed between you and Deville before he

would address you thus? Unjustly, of course; but still men that do these things themselves, know how they are done."

"Well, how are they done?" said Lady Fitzhauton, colouring deeply.

"How should I know?—But not altogether by letter," replied Mrs. Sparkleton. "Yet almost everybody would conclude from this that the affair between you is of long standing—and that you must often have pardoned indiscretions—long listened to solicitations—which married women of rank and character *don't!* Besides, Lord Fitzhauton would be sure to challenge him, if he believed in Deville's nonsense, which I don't—and how absurd it would be for you to be the cause of an affair which might end unpleasantly!"

"I don't care—I *will* find out—who the woman is!" replied Lady Fitzhauton, with vehemence. "Can you imagine who it can be, Mrs. Sparkleton? Do tell me, for I am determined to know!"

"He flirts with so many women, that

how in the world—but Lord Deville will know best, if he really wrote that letter," returned Mrs. Sparkleton; and we can scarcely record with certainty whether she was more alarmed or exasperated at the cross-examination to which she was subjected. "You can hardly expect Lord Fitzhauton will be so communicative, but"—

On that little word the door opened, and in entered the ill-timed viscount himself! with all his usual tranquil elegance of manner, excepting that he did show a momentary surprise when his glance fell upon the two ladies reading the epistle.

"Look here, my lord!" exclaimed Mrs. Sparkleton,—but luckily not quite yielding to the passion of indignation that filled her—"Lady Fitzhauton has received quite a valentine this morning, and we cannot make out from whom it comes. Can you?"

Lord Deville very slightly changed colour, as he took the letter. But he read it to himself with a deliberate gravity, which strongly contrasted with the eager, angry

visages of the two ladies—especially Mrs. Sparkleton's!—What passions gleamed beneath its outward calm! Lady Fitzhauton looked rather remorseful and struck, as if she had done an unhandsome thing (and so she had) to her devoted admirer.

"Very passionate, indeed!—No, madam, I cannot even imagine who could send such a letter to Mrs. Sparkleton," he said, after finishing the perusal, and handing it, with a graceful bow and smile, to that lady.

"It did not come to Mrs. Sparkleton—it came to me!" said Lady Fitzhauton, with asperity. "Why must everything go to Mrs. Sparkleton? Now confess the truth, Lord Deville, did you not write it yourself?"

"I, madam! On such a subject, I should think, I could express myself, I was going to say, better—but I mean, not exactly in this way—and I always sign my name when I write," replied the viscount, excessively amazed and embarrassed, in secret. "But, good heavens! is it possible, Lady Fitzhauton, that you should imagine I

would join in a conspiracy against you? For the only rational conclusion I can come to on this letter, is, that some wretch whom you have treated with deserved contempt, has written it to you, intending that it should fall into your husband's hands, and furnish him with a pretext for the neglect with which, I am sorry to say, everybody remarks he treats you. Perhaps even *the female* herself, alluded to in this note, has done it!"

No, we should never accomplish it, and therefore we relinquish all attempt to describe Mrs. Sparkleton's sensations on hearing these words! Wonder, rage, admiration of the brilliant diplomatic talent displayed—indignation at the insinuations conveyed—all at work together in her soul!

But the vain and by no means very penetrating peeress fell easily into the trick. "Do you really think it is so? Oh, what a wretch, what a fiend, the woman must be! But how do you know there is a woman?

Only let me know *that!* Only let me know *that!*"

"I am not sufficiently acquainted with Lord Fitzhauton's affairs to form even a conjecture," said Deville, very much agitated within, but very calm without.

"The idea is really so wicked that I cannot believe it is anything but a fancy of Lord Deville's," said Mrs. Sparkleton, darting a look at him, which he appreciated. "I believe these anonymous letters are almost always lies, and founded on lies, invented by cowardly slanderers, who have only the heads without the hearts of assassins! I advise you to take no further notice of the matter, Lady Fitzhauton—unless you know somebody that was to give you a breakfast and strawberries next Saturday!"

"My parties are pretty extensively heard of—my breakfasts, you know, are quite renowned—the villain must be an ingenious fellow to authenticate his falsehoods, in some degree, with a remarkable circum-

stance," said Deville; "I *do* give a breakfast next Saturday—but I am not sure that the invitations are issued yet."

"None has reached me, however," said Mrs. Sparkleton, drily.

"Let me supply the omission then—if omission it may be called," replied Deville.

"I am afraid it is a little too late. I have some thoughts of going to Paris for a short time," said Mrs. Sparkleton. "And that puts me in mind, I have a commission to execute for a friend there, so I must run away even from such 'goodly companie!'"

And lightly and playfully in manner, but with a bitterness of resentment quite understood by its object, Mrs. Sparkleton proceeded on her morning calls.

Deville was exceedingly alarmed. He knew that he had not deceived Mrs. Sparkleton by his explanation, and that her leaving him alone with Lady Fitzhauton, to discourse on the topic, was a direct defiance which meant mischief. At the same time

he feared that, although mystified, Lady Fitzhauton would not in reality be persuaded he was not the author of the anonymous letter.

Her first words after Mrs. Sparkleton's departure sufficiently revealed this fact. "I know very well you wrote it, Lord Deville! and I insist on knowing who this woman is! Is it Mrs. Sparkleton? What right have you to take away a person's character—if it is not—for I shall be obliged to tell my brother, and prevent him from marrying her!"

"But, my dear Lady Fitzhauton, how could you be so extraordinarily imprudent as to show that letter to any one—above all, to Mrs. Sparkleton?"

"I wanted her to see what people thought of her behind her back: I wanted her to know that she is not everybody!—And I will let Fitzhauton see it, that I may find out whether you have been telling me the truth or not, or only trying to set me against him."

"Pray don't do that!—your own observation might alone convince you; but if you will give me a little time,—for heaven's sake, Lady Fitzhauton, consider what you are about!" exclaimed Deville, exceedingly alarmed.

"I will, and I do! and if you don't prove it to me, as sure as my name is Ann Gullibull—no, I mean Fitzhauton—I will tell my husband what you say—I will show him the letter!" returned the headstrong countess.

"But what would you, then? Why would you give yourself so much pain?" said the viscount, infinitely perplexed. "If indeed you would take a rational revenge—such a revenge as women of sense in general take—I have no doubt I could convince you—I don't say of their guilt—but certainly, that it is rather prudence than virtue, or love for you, that keeps them innocent."

"Now, if you will, Lord Deville!—if you only will, Lord Deville!—But if you do

not, I declare, by all that's good, I will show this letter to Lord Fitzhauton!"

"You shall be satisfied. But, meanwhile, say that you do not hate me! Repeat the assurance which your dear lips gave me a few days ago, that if you had not been wedded to another. At your feet I implore the repetition of those exquisite words, a music almost too flatteringly sweet for human sense!"

And with honied blandishments like these, working on the irritated mind of Lady Fitzhauton, the viscount at last managed to extort a confession from her, that if she could only once believe her husband really could prefer another to her, she knew, —she was sure, she should greatly prefer— the kneeling adorer at her feet. In short, Deville had reason to believe, that if he could manage to soothe Mrs. Sparkleton's displeasure, and give her a little longer time and opportunity to compromise herself, and excite Lady Fitzhauton's jealousy

to a little higher pitch, he should at last attain the goal of his own schemes.

The viscount stayed to take lunch with Lord Fitzhauton, who happened to come home very shortly after, and then proceeded on his enterprise to Mrs. Sparkleton's.

CHAPTER IV.

LORD DEVILLE was quite aware that he had a difficult task before him; but so much depended on its skilful execution that he bent every energy to succeed. The impudence of a visit from him was in itself so unexpected, that Mrs. Sparkleton had not even given orders to deny him admission. She had barely time to withdraw from the library, to which visitors were usually introduced, on observing him enter, from the window.

"I see I have disturbed Mrs. Sparkleton —say, I merely wish to speak with her for a single instant," said his lordship, quietly seating himself at the table which she had just left.

Mrs. Sparkleton had been writing a note. Some blotting-paper remained on the open desk, and by some chance or other Deville's eye rested upon it. It was not the coarse mercantile red, but fine white blotting-paper, delicate as the hands that applied it—but not by any means so trustworthy as its dark-hued relatives. Instead of the confused blotches and chaotic lettering of its vulgar namesake, the aristocratic blotting-paper in question took off a very clear fac-simile of whatever it was applied to. Lord Deville read at a glance, and very distinctly, a direction to Lord Fitzhauton, not at his own house, but at his club, though in reversed characters! He could not resist the impulse, and raised the paper to the light. In a moment or two he had read what satisfied him that it was a document worth preserving; and with that intent he quietly transferred it to his pocket-book.

Mrs. Sparkleton had meanwhile recovered her temper, or at least her manners, for she entered quite in her usual way, about a

moment too late. Even Deville was astonished at her admirable self-possession. "I saw you so shortly ago, that I feel quite a curiosity to know what I owe this additional pleasure to?" she said, smilingly.

Deville, it seemed, had called from a very kind motive. It was to put Mrs. Sparkleton on her guard against one of the most extraordinary misconstructions he had ever heard of! After her departure from Fitzhauton house he had learned, with the utmost astonishment, that her ladyship was possessed with a violent suspicion, Mrs. Sparkleton herself was the rival against whom the anonymous writer warned her!

"I leave you to judge of my surprise! I was never more startled and amazed in my life," observed his lordship. "It must unavoidably be that your little flirtation in Paris has come to Lady Fitzhauton's ears. Let me request you to do nothing, however innocent, that may give countenance to the invention."

"Is it possible!—And had she the inso-

lence to say such things to my very face?" said Mrs. Sparkleton, with warmth; and Lord Deville continued to reiterate all the possible provoking things he had either heard or could invent, as having been uttered by the jealous wife. He succeeded admirably in his main object.

"Lord Deville! if you believe me, I will not alter my conduct—my manner of behaving to Lord Fitzhauton—to please all the jealous fools in England! I do nothing that is wrong (here she coloured a little), and I will not take the slightest trouble to remove—in fact, it would be the very way to confirm—the absurd fancies of that very foolish person. You know what a respect I have for your opinion, (here they both smiled) and do tell me whether you think I am not right in relinquishing an intention I had formed half an hour ago of spending the autumn in Paris or Dresden?"

"Don't even mention it, my dear Mrs. Sparkleton!—some report would be sure to be raised immediately which would give

your friends the greatest pain—me beyond all," said Lord Deville, veritably alarmed at the idea. "Lady Fitzhauton will be certain to say that she frightened you off—and society will sustain an irretrievable loss. London society, I mean,—of course, Paris or Dresden would gain infinitely!"

This matter satisfactorily arranged, and leaving Mrs. Sparkleton quite in the humour to do all in her power to add to, instead of diminishing the jealous sentiments of Lady Fitzhauton, Deville retired to his own house. There he examined the blotting-paper at more leisure, and distinctly made out the following words, after two hours of assiduous labour, assisted by the flame of a naphtha lamp:—

"Lady Fitzhauton's extraordinary behaviour .... to concert measures ... I will meet you, according to the appointment about settling ... horrid woman ... account ... at Mad .... (and one hour's toil was well bestowed in clearly deciphering the name) at Madame Millefleurs, at

five o'clock, on Thursday, the 7th, when I am to be there to see some things from Paris. We ought not . . . . meet again . . . and, after that, I am firmly determined to break off all correspondence with your wife, and consequently . . . ." The rest was so crossed and blotted that it was only possible to make out a chance word here and there. Enough, however, remained to convince the anxious inquisitor that as yet the parties were clear of actual guilt, and to show that whatever were the true motives of this secret interview, they were varnished over with a very fair pretext of harmless business. There were expressions of gratitude for the kind assistance proffered by Fitz-hauton—a statement of the enormous locked-up wealth the writer possessed in shares, which rather astonished the viscount—and assurances of almost immediate repayment—which left it doubtful, even to Deville himself, whether the appointment was not really and exclusively on business. Only he knew the character of the man; and had a very ill opinion of all women.

But did this discovery altogether please him? Deville was himself surprised to find what emotions of envy and hatred roused themselves in his soul, as he speculated on the degree of success Fitzhauton had achieved with the brilliant widow. We certainly think he would have felt but little less if his dangling after Mrs. Sparkleton had been a sincere and vehement courtship! In fact, he began to suspect that he liked her more than he had imagined. Some feeling more than usually strong must certainly have animated the cautious viscount in the course of policy he adopted.

In the first place, he managed, by dint of erasures and cross writing, to render it impossible to decipher such parts of the note as were not necessary to produce the impression that a regular assignation was granted, or to leave it doubtful whether, if so, it was the first, or one of a series.

His lordship then despatched an apology to a house where he had promised to dine, and took a leisurely stroll towards Madame Millefleur's establishment. That eminent

marchande de modes, as she delighted to call herself, resided in a house large enough for a nobleman with a great retinue, in a square which had only lately descended to admit the shadow of trade within its aristocratic limits. Nothing but a vast brass plate on the door, and an open hall attended by a porter in livery, announced that the mansion in question belonged to a milliner. Madame Millefleurs herself and her husband lived in great state and luxury on the ground floor; the middle rooms displayed, in a long suite, the most delicate and ingenious productions of her art, and the various personal adornments in which she dealt. Above these toiled, night and day, in dense and suffering throngs, the hapless young women dedicated to the production of these articles of refined habiliment.

Lord Deville made some inquiries in the neighbourhood, and ascertained that Madame Millefleurs was a most respectable woman—which means that no coroner had as yet returned a verdict against her, though her

young people had a great trick of dying, and that she paid her butcher's and baker's bills pretty regularly. But he had formed a theory of his own—that she must be a woman of an *obliging disposition*, though of course not professionally so. Whatever Mrs. Sparkleton had done or meant to do, she was a woman whom Deville himself acknowledged was incapable of doing anything wrong, in a flagrant manner, or with [illegible] understanding and determination of doing it. [illegible], the blotting-paper repeatedly declared that she only granted this interview to convince Lord Fitzhauton of the folly and danger of their even meeting at all; that when she saw him, she meant to give him a thousand reasons why she ought never to see him—and to demonstrate that the only way to avoid temptation was never to venture near it! And that was true enough.

Society is becoming rather a complex game, it must be confessed. While Deville was making his inquiries without, Lord Fitzhauton was effecting a satisfactory

arrangement within, with his new ally, Madame Millefleurs.

"Your account, you know, is very long, and, I daresay, pretty difficult to audit—you must take care we are not interrupted," he was saying, almost as Deville passed.

"Ah, milor! what will become of my réputation?—One can do no ting in England without a caractère!"

"But everything with one!" responded his lordship. "Bah! Millefleurs, you have a character good enough to send you to glory, if it is not too carefully investigated. But who is going to do the slightest possible damage to your character?"

"Eh, milor!—but mon honneur!"

"Pho, we are old acquaintances."

"But now dat M. Millefleurs make me one honest woman"—remonstrated the modiste.

"More than heaven itself can, much less a little Frenchman!" replied Fitzhauton, laughing heartily. "How came you to marry such a withered crab-apple?"

"Oh, he is so useful!" sighed Madame Millefleurs. "He mind de house, he pack de good, keep de book, make de bill, trim de lamp, and when no one pay me, he go to prison for my debt!"

"Well, well—if you want me to pay Mrs. Sparkleton's—and I really don't think she herself has much to spare at this moment,—nor, indeed, have I, for I am as much annoyed as any body, and hold quite [illegible] of people wanting money, every morning—you must allow me an opportunity to examine the items of your account. That's flat, so don't bore me with your *honneur* and *caractère*, and stuff of that sort."

It happened that a few moments after the delivery of this decisive opinion, Deville observed his friend sally forth, attended to the door by Madame Millefleurs, curtseying, laughing, remonstrating, and assenting, with a million protests and entreaties to the contrary. He did not hear what was said, for he was at some

distance; but he was skilled in interpretations, and went on his way still more exasperated, and incited to his own purposes, by what he considered the intended treachery of his friend. Fitzhauton did not know, he reasoned, that his addresses to Mrs. Sparkleton were merely feigned, to cover a more substantial pursuit, and consequently he felt himself injured and insulted, as if they had been as much in earnest as they seemed to be! He had a just motive for revenge, and it is astonishing what energy to commit great wrongs, a little right in them gives one! When Manning fractured O'Connor's skull with as little remorse as he could have broken up a cocoa-nut, he declared himself sustained by this great principle. But it presented itself for adoption in a much more polished and civilized form to Viscount Deville. He determined to communicate the result of his researches to Lady Fitzhauton, and to expect the best results from her exasperated passions and imprudence.

Deville had learned, by a somewhat

perilous experience, the inexpediency of trusting her ladyship with secrets too long before it was advisable they should explode. He kept that of the blotting-paper, therefore, until the morning of the day in which the meeting at Madame Millefleurs was to take place. It happened to be the one for which he had already issued cards to a numerous company, inviting them to what he called a Musical Breakfast. His lordship was a great patron of the Opera, and could at all times command the services of the finest performers. His concerts were greatly in vogue, and the delicious repasts with which he accompanied them, rendered them quite the rage. He knew Mrs. Sparkleton would not come—for she had sent him word, in reply to a most flattering invitation, that she was previously engaged. He thought it therefore probable that Fitzhatton would not stay long; as, besides, he only admired music on the stage. At all events, he should have plenty of opportunity to make a communication that he had one to make.

and leave it to Lady Fitzhauton's better judgment as to the when and the where—Deville felt satisfied that it would be in time to prevent his friend from reaping the projected harvest of his hopes, and to do all the necessary mischief.

It would perhaps have been a safer method not to make the revelation until it was too late to leave the injured parties any satisfaction but revenge. Nevertheless the viscount could not bring himself to this resolution. He either liked Mrs. Sparkleton better than he had thought, or disliked his rival too much, to contemplate with any patience the possibilities of his triumph. After all, too, Mrs. Sparkleton might change her mind; she was very changeable; and some alibi might occur to destroy the credibility of his blotting-paper.

Fitzhauton and his wife were in a much better temper than usual with each other on this particular morning. The young peer was in the highest spirits, so full of gaiety and good humour that even his wife

came in for a share of it. It has been remarked by a practical observer, that lovers are apt to show the greatest signs of fondness when they least feel it; and, at times, husbands and wives may find it expedient to work on the same principle. However that may be, Deville's exasperation was increased by the marks of fondness, approaching to folly, which her ladyship thought proper to lavish on her husband, before his face, and indeed before every body's that chose to look on. It offended Lord Deville's taste as well as his feelings; while Lady Fitzhauton greatly enjoyed making him jealous, as she thought, and at the same time displaying to all the world, how absolute was in reality her hold on her husband's affections.

"You see," she said to Lord Deville, privately, in triumph, "You see! I have only to show the least sort of kindness for him, and he plays about me like a lapdog!"

"I cannot contain myself any longer on witnessing such perfidy!" exclaimed

Deville, in reply—and he had no occasion to feign being out of patience; "I will prove to you that it is all the vilest treachery, if you will or can but grant me half an hour's interview."

"Oh, nonsense, I know how it is. You have often tried to make me believe you were in love with me, and now you want me to fancy you are jealous of me,—because Fitzhauton and I are such good friends," replied Lady Fitzhauton, coquettishly smiling, and flourishing her fan; while the music made so good a noise, she ran little risk of being overheard. "Go, you naughty man! You ought not to try and make mischief between man and wife."

"You do not believe me—you always mock me in this way," said Deville, warmly. "But I have now proofs—proofs impossible to be refuted—that he is deceiving you in the grossest manner. Still, I know you will not believe in any, though they were glaring as the sun at noonday—or rather as the flames in the abyss! So I

shall depart to-morrow for the continent, and leave you to find out things at your leisure."

"But you have no proof,—you only talk because you do not like Fitzhauton, and see that Mrs. Sparkleton is after him."

"Why, this very day—this very afternoon—I can give you the most convincing proof in the world, that he is only feigning this kindness the better to deceive you!"

"How will you manage that?" said Lady Fitzhauton, with mocking complacency of incredulity.

"I will show you a fac-simile of a note from Mrs. Sparkleton to your husband—if you will promise inviolable secrecy!—which contains some proof, at all events, of a very extraordinary degree of confidence in, and tenderness for, another woman's husband!"

"Let me see it now, and I will believe you," said Lady Fitzhauton, with sudden vivacity.

"How can I before all this society? But tell me when you will be at leisure, for five minutes—alone."

"I know it is impossible—quite impossible—you cannot have any proofs of such nonsense," said Lady Fitzhauton, turning pale. "I declare, I really will tell Fitzhauton—and Mrs. Sparkleton too—if you annoy me in this way."

"You may, if I do not establish what I assert, on the firmest evidence," replied the viscount.

"I don't believe it. But I will drop my bracelet in the acacia vase there, and you can bring it after me to my house. Fitzhauton told me he was going from here to his club, and should probably not dine at home."

"Did he, indeed?" replied Deville, with a bitter smile. "I shall not forget to bring the bracelet. But let us listen to this overture: they are in the *piano* now, and we may be overheard."

After this priming, Lady Fitzhauton

was quite ready for the engineer to load, when, about an hour after the concert-party had broken up, Deville arrived at her residence with the bracelet. He found her at lunch, and she invited him to partake; which he accepted. First, he satisfied himself the footman thoroughly comprehended the purpose of his visit was to restore a bracelet accidentally dropped —"I knew it must be yours, for I had often admired the brilliancy of the rubies in the snake's head," he remarked. "And, as I was coming this way,—" the servant withdrew, and he did not feel it necessary to proceed with the legend, more especially as Lady Fitzhauton instantly and imperatively demanded what he meant by saying he had proofs against her husband and Mrs. Sparkleton!

"Judge yourself; I found this facsimile, as I said, of a note from Mrs. Sparkleton to him, on her desk, by the merest accident in the world. You know her handwriting very well. Hold it up to the light

and read in the oriental style—*from* the right *to* the left."

It would not be easy to do justice to the emotion with which Lady Fitzhauton snatched the fatal blotting-paper, with which she gradually deciphered its half obliterated contents.

"Oh, the wretches, the monsters! It is a regular assignation! I will tell Mamma, I will tell Papa! Papa shall get me divorced; I will have my money back again, every halfpenny; he shall not have a farthing of mine! And then I'll marry somebody else — I'll marry you, Lord Deville! I'll bring them both to justice —the wretches! Poor, poor Mamma,— she little knows! What shall I do? I'll expose them to every one; I'll go with a dozen policemen, and have them both taken to the station-house!"

And then she fell into a passion of weeping. The violence of the resolutions she hinted at, however, gave no satisfaction to her informant.

"It may, after all, be merely on matters of business they are to meet," he observed, in the first pause of the tempest. "Though I own I do not quite perceive why they could not transact it at Mrs. Sparkleton's, where Lord Fitzhauton, I hear, is a constant visitor—at least his groom tells my valet so! I have no other authority. But Madame Millefleurs is a woman of excellent character, and—"

"Yes, she is Mamma's dressmaker, but Mrs. Sparkleton recommended her to us,—and she knew her in Paris,—no doubt, when that wicked man she writes to was there," exclaimed Lady Fitzhauton.

"Well, but you cannot deny *I* have given you due warning," said Deville. "It may be but suspicion, I grant. They have known each other long. Her husband was a peevish old invalid—and a coquettish young woman of her vivacious temperament (not that ever I heard their flirtation in Paris was anything extraordinary—for that capital), *might* be a dangerous

companion, *might* be in dangerous company with Lord Fitzhauton. Powder and spark are best kept asunder, no doubt. For, with the very best intentions, one really does, sometimes, do anything but the very best deeds. I should certainly recommend your making one of the party, but in a quiet orderly manner, so that you may not exhibit yourself to the world in the ridiculous character of a jealous wife. It will be quite sufficient, I should think, if you let Mrs. Sparkleton and his lordship comprehend that you have them in your power, and that, consequently, they must in future break off any acquaintance that may at present exist. I have no doubt Mrs. Sparkleton will *continentalise*, and, unless you have lost all regard for Lord Fitzhauton,—you had better not drive him to despair."

"I have—I hate him—a wretch! After all the money we have given him, to behave so to me," wept Lady Fitzhauton. "Only let me have her in my power! I'll let

every body know what she is. Will you go with me, Lord Deville, and be my witness?"

"My dear Lady Fitzhauton, what witness could I be?" replied his lordship, shrugging his shoulders. "Do you think, if we go in a violent manner, that they will allow us an opportunity of witnessing—anything very remarkable? We shall find them gravely at their accounts with Madame Millefleurs and half a dozen milliners in the room. Besides, you have unfortunately compromised me, by allowing Mrs. Sparkleton to see, and retain my note to you! What a figure should I cut in the transaction! A cold-hearted world would not take into calculation the frenzied warmth of my attachment to the loveliest of women, and prejudices are already excited against me! And besides, *are* you prepared to part with Fitzhauton for ever? to resign him altogether to the artful and pernicious woman who has weaned his affections from you so completely?"

Certainly Lady Fitzhauton was *not* prepared for this: in reality, she still loved her wandering lord as much as nature so feebly organized could love. Still she kept up a becoming spirit.

"I don't care for him the least in the world—still she shall never have him, if I die for it!"

"Then, my dearest girl, I recommend you to act calmly and reasonably," said Deville. "By calmly and reasonably I mean, don't let people see that you have a human feeling, if possible. Speech may have been given to man to hide his thoughts, but I doubt very much if it was given to woman for that purpose. Your presence will be quite sufficient, I should think: perhaps they may be able to explain matters to your satisfaction, especially Mrs. Sparkleton—for men are apt to be dumbfoundered on these occasions. Perhaps there is not much mischief done—as yet. I have no doubt that this is their first private meeting, and it may be

simply an imprudence which we must deplore and—pardon. You can take your revenge in due season: you can worry him nicely in turn! We are both wronged —bitterly wronged—but women of sense know how to pay in kind! and if the devotion of one poor heart—of a heart wronged like your own,—if a love, vast indeed, but pure as the heavens——"

"But what can I do to find them out?" interrupted Lady Fitzhauton.

"You must first promise me to do it in a quiet, lady-like manner," responded his lordship; "Mrs. Sparkleton *thinks* she wrongs me, no doubt, but I would not give her up to shame! There is nothing I hate more than a scene! Besides, the world would think I ought to challenge him; and then I could no longer visit here, and I should lose my only hold on hope!"

"Well, I promise it—only tell me how?"

"Madame Millefleurs is a most respectable woman," observed his lordship,

musingly; "I have ascertained *that.* Accordingly, you have only to present yourself, as soon after the arrival of Mrs. Sparkleton and his lordship as you can make it convenient, inform Madame of your certain knowledge of their presence in her house, and threaten her with immediate exposure, unless she introduces you instantly to their society — making her comprehend that, on those conditions, everything shall be quietly arranged; and I have little doubt she will prudently comply. I will call about the same time—accidentally, to inquire—no matter what,—I will make myself an errand, and Madame Millefleurs will be additionally alarmed by my propinquity, into anything which may prevent an exposure."

Admirably as this plan was combined, Deville had great difficulty in persuading Lady Fitzhauton to acquiesce in it. But the prospect of still retaining her faithless spouse, and of being able to visit Mrs. Sparkleton at the same time with the

punishment of her offences, gradually reconciled her to its execution. Lady Fitzhauton had a good stock of vanity, and she could not by any effort bring herself to believe that any woman could permanently rival her in the affections of Fitzhauton. She thought she had only to appear, to dispel the illusions raised by the artifices of the "infamous creature" who, she was sure, must have thrown herself almost "at him" before he would even think of her! Deville encouraged this idea by the most flattering assurances, until he had brought her into what he considered a safe frame of mind for the enterprise. The artful viscount by no means desired an explosion which was so likely to blacken all in its neighbourhood. He had no wish whatever to have Lady Fitzhauton cast on his hands, and to destroy again that finely-pieced Portland vase of a character of his which was almost as good as if it had never fallen and been broken. Meanwhile, the hour of

the appointment approached, and it became necessary to act. We have great satisfaction, because we also dislike the species of private theatricals which furnishes scenes for the public, to be able to record that, finally, the viscount prevailed on Lady Fitzhauton to act, according to his temperate and judicious advice, rather than on the inspiration of her own rash and headstrong temper.

CHAPTER V.

Whilst all these storms were brewing or bursting in the lofty region she had deserted, Charity Green pursued her blameless way, if not in peace, at least in quiet. Punctual as the morning light, she appeared in her allotted corner of the bazaar; all day reversed the lily's enviable existence, for she both toiled and spun, and at night returned to her humble but tranquil home, if not happy, not miserable. The consciousness of having done what she ought—of having bravely vindicated the rights of nature and of womanhood—the sentiment of freedom and independence, consoled her for every sad

recollection, and sweetened the dry crusts of poverty to her palate.

Neither could Charity be said to suffer very greatly, in a pecuniary sense. The beauty of her handiwork was appreciated by some good judges, and her lace was bought almost as fast as it was produced. The ladies who bought it did what the conscientious maker refused to do, and gave it value by giving it fine foreign designations to critical friends and chamber-maids. Charity seemed likely to fall, by degrees, into a similar state of resigned and tranquil composure to that enjoyed by her friend, Miss Dishnap, but that she continued, after a short interval, to be harassed by the visits of Mr. Bagshawe.

The retired attorney made his re-appearance one day when least expected, with an empty envelope in his hand. Charity was exceedingly fluttered to hear him ask, in an angry tone, why she had not enclosed a receipt for the note he had sent her, instead of forwarding him a

blank cover? She assured him, with great earnestness, that she had returned the valuable paper in it, having no occasion for it at the time, and that she thanked him just the same as if she had accepted the fifty pounds. "So I believe you do—not a spark of gratitude in your whole composition! Mrs. Gullibull told me so several times; but you must not think to do me out of both note and thanks! You have kept the money, no doubt: confess the truth! It is numbered and stopped at the bank." And he continued to tease Charity for some time in this vein, until he shifted his ground, and accused her warmly of pride and ingratitude, in refusing to let him be of any service to her.

After this he began to make it a sort of habit to stroll into the bazaar, at least once a day, and spend some time in conversation at Miss Dishnap's stall. Charity ventured to remonstrate once or twice, but he told her the bazaar was as free to

him as to anybody else, so long as he behaved himself with propriety, and did not steal anything. He took it into his head to tell her that he was paying his addresses to a young lady, who was very fond of fine lacework; and he was always buying pieces of her manufacture to present to this favoured fair one. Charity at first very nigh believed him, and showed so much satisfaction and zeal to oblige her unknown customer, that Bagshawe could not prevent himself from laughing, and so betraying his real purpose, though he was vexed at her indifference. After that he was obliged to buy what he wanted of Miss Dishnap; Charity would sell him no more; but he had a most persevering liking for whatever other people did not purchase.

He had contrived, in some way or another, to gain very rapidly on the latter lady's good opinion. Like most converts, Miss Dishnap was benevolently anxious to bring others into the same saving pale

of belief she had herself wandered into; and Bagshawe managed to persuade her that he was "open to conviction." He listened with great respect to her opinions on religious subjects, and declared that he had been brought up in so lax a set of doctrines, that the ground for any new edifice might be considered as perfectly clear in his convictions. Gradually he induced her to allow him to accompany her and her young acolyte to their place of devotion. He professed himself pleased and edified by all he heard and saw there, and bought a splendid missal for his own use, which he prevailed on Miss Dishnap to let him exchange with hers, a much inferior one. And thus he won so fast upon the esteem of her friend, that Charity began to dread in her a dangerous ally to pretensions which she somehow or another felt herself not so much inclined to discourage as formerly, yet she thought was a wrong to the suitor himself to encourage.

The inconstancy and unkindness of her first love had left wounds too deep in Charity's soul to be readily healed; and the more she was convinced of the sincerity and devotion of her new lover, the more it pained her to feel unable to return his affection, and to be compelled constantly to repel its manifestations. Meanwhile, Bagshawe took care to keep her well informed as to the progress of Midas in his aristocratic wooing, which, to outward seeming, was most prosperous. And Charity's heart was torn to its depths; but, like the Indian at the stake, she gave no outward sign of anguish. She came at last to wish that the event was over, the wrong consummated, so tediously did it irk her soul in its progress.

Matters were in this state with Charity Green, when a momentous incident occurred to diversify her daily round of existence. She was one day busied, as usual, in her stall, nearly concealed—as Mr. Bagshawe delighted to tell her—like

a spider, among her exquisite looms, when a lady entered the bazaar, whose appearance attracted very general attention from its elegance, and the peculiar gracefulness of her manner of walking. She had a little nosegay of rare and most beautiful flowers in her hand, so that altogether Charity had little difficulty in recognising the honourable Mrs. Sparkleton. She shrunk from the sight, and endeavoured as much as possible to shun any danger of being recognised in turn, by bending over her work until she was scarcely to be seen at all.

Nevertheless a kind of fascination compelled her to keep up a degree of observation, almost without the use of her eyes, on all Mrs. Sparkleton did. Once or twice she passed so near to Charity's stall that the latter coloured and turned pale with apprehension of being discovered, perhaps treated with contempt; but she felt that she could as little endure to be treated with kindness as with neglect by Mrs. Sparkleton.

Her modest nature, indeed, suggested to Charity, that she might have entirely slipped out of the lady's memory; but she dared not run any risk to the contrary.

We know not how she managed it; but, in the course of this furtive espial, Charity imagined she discerned marks of much agitation and irresolution beneath all her beautiful rival's usual serenity of elegance. She looked at things apparently without seeing them—inquired the prices of articles which she evidently had no desire to know—for what could Mrs. Sparkleton want with a skipping-rope and a speaking doll? She walked more rapidly than her wont, for her walk was in general a swan-like, swimming movement, so unruffled was the calm of its grace! Charity was forming a theory in her own mind to account for this. Is she won by the wealth of Midas, thought she, and yet repelled by his cruel, hard nature—for Mrs. Sparkleton is not cruel, nor hard by nature, herself? Do these thoughts make a

struggle in her mind? And while musing over this problem, and keeping the object mysteriously in eye without raising her head, Charity was startled from her dreamy cogitation by the abrupt apparition of Lord Fitzhauton, who entered the bazaar, and seemed to join Mrs. Sparkleton, as if by appointment.

Charity was shocked at this—she scarcely well knew why—she thought she could perceive there was something unusual, besides the mere circumstance of an evidently pre-arranged meeting between them. Mrs. Sparkleton's complexion suddenly flushed as deeply as the hues of the rich flowers she carried; and Lord Fitzhauton's countenance and eyes were lit up like a young vulture's when he discerns his prey. Charity saw that at first Mrs. Sparkleton seemed to refuse taking his arm, and that he seized her hand and linked it in his own with a degree of violence. As if to avoid attention, Mrs. Sparkleton appeared then to resume her

promenade in the bazaar; but evidently the pair were quite absorbed in conversation, and noticed little but themselves in the place.

Once or twice they disappeared among the mazes of glittering wares, and Charity imagined they were gone—but whither, or wherefore, she dreaded to conjecture. Why this private and special meeting?—Much as she feared to be recognised, Charity felt it a relief when, on one of these occasions, she suddenly heard the voice of Lord Fitzhauton close behind the stall at which she sat.

We have mentioned that Miss Dishnap's stall, like the rest of her appurtenances, was a retired and almost secluded one—not unsuited therefore as a halting place for a private confabulation. Miss Dishnap was absent on some business, and Charity had cowered out of sight like a fawn among the fern. The conversationists had therefore no reason to dread listeners; and certainly, although

they spoke in low tones, they had no reason to desire them for their subject-matter of their talk. Against her will—at first through timidity, and then from surprise and anxiety to know the worst—Charity Green remained an unseen auditor.

She heard Mrs. Sparkleton declare—but in irresolute, tremulous tones—that she had altered her mind—that she would not meet Lord Fitzhauton at Madame Millefleurs' under any pretext; that if he sincerely desired to be of service to her in a momentary exigency, he could go and discharge the "impertinent creature's" demands alone. What need was there of her presence? She fully admitted the items of the amount—that is to say, she had no doubt it was quite correct, though she had not yet had time to run it over. Besides, she kept no memorandums about such trash as one's dress; so it was no use if she had.

To all which Lord Fitzhauton replied,

in an earnest and passionate manner, which seemed not a little superfluous on such a point. He pleaded her promise; he upbraided her with changeableness; he declared that it would look quite absurd in a man inspecting such accounts. Moreover, it was she who was to pay, and not he: he only wanted to witness the transaction for her, and to make certain that Madame Millefleurs behaved to her with due respect!

"But it might be liable to misconstruction!" said Mrs. Sparkleton, colouring again with almost a country wench's profusion of hue, when first honoured with the attentions of a redcoat.

"Quite impossible!—Are you not to marry my brother-in-law?—from whom I may very naturally and kindly conceal any little proof of inconsideration on your part, in money matters?" said Lord Fitzhatton, and they both laughed a little.

"Well, but—you are yourself so imprudent!—You will promise not to speak to

me on—on a subject which you know I have forbidden you to mention—and which I am forbidden to listen to; I believe?" replied Mrs. Sparkleton, with a sigh.

"I was born to obey you—and I will, in all things," said the young peer, who certainly did not hesitate to make promises. "But, then, you must promise me to look less bewitching!—Dearest Geraldine, I will pledge myself only to worship you in my soul and in my eyes! The severest moralist will allow that—at least, let him see you, and he will absolve me if he blames."

"Folly, folly!—Well, I will go, then, if you will promise not to trench on this forbidden subject," said Mrs. Sparkleton—in accents meant to be rebuking and severe, but full of melting tones.

Lord Fitzhauton's rapture, his pledges of eternal love and gratitude, were again very considerably out of place. Mrs. Sparkleton herself perceived it.

"Do not burst into these acclamations,

or we shall be overheard—and people will wonder to see so much thankfulness displayed for the privilege of paying one a bill!—I shall be at Millefleurs' at half-past five—I wish meanwhile you would leave me. I do not wish to be seen by any one in your company!"

Charity was condemned to hear another effusion of passionate love and gratitude, which compelled even her innocent and guileless simplicity to conceive the most terrible suspicions of the nature of the interview in contemplation! Terrible to her; for Charity, among her innumerable old-fashioned notions, had some of the most antiquated possible on the sacredness of the marriage-plight, and on female propriety in general.

Mrs. Sparkleton replied with rebuke, but of that tender and gentle kind which rather encourages than abashes the orators of passion. In short, before they parted, the conviction was fully established in poor Charity's mind, that her own success-

ful rival was in almost inevitable danger of becoming also her cousin, Lady Fitzhauton's guilty one!

To increase her perturbation, Mrs. Sparkleton remained, after Lord Fitzhauton, at her earnest entreaty, had withdrawn—very likely to establish an alibi. She even commenced a survey of the lace-work on the stall with the curiosity of an amateur. Horrified and confused, Charity still kept her visage out of sight, and Mrs. Sparkleton had twice inquired the price of a fine lace veil, without receiving any reply, when luckily Miss Dishnap returned.

"Miss Green, don't you hear?—A lady is inquiring the price of that veil—the one with the open roses."

Charity was never very good at acting; yet she managed to give a start on this occasion, as if her attention was roused for the first time; and, rising with some murmured apology about a cold, she named a price which rather surprised Miss Dishnap.

"Ten guineas!" she whispered; "why, you only asked five yesterday!"

Mrs. Sparkleton also seemed a little surprised; for she glanced at the vender inquiringly. The innocent Charity trembled and blushed scarlet beneath the observation of her by no means equally innocent rival—more ashamed, perhaps, of her involuntary detection than the parties themselves would have been, but for fear of consequences. Nevertheless, even Charity was surprised at the haughtiness of superiority with which the aristocratic customer examined the plebeian shop-girl, apparently struck by some recollection of her features.

"Ten guineas is a great deal for such a thing as that, though it is pretty!—But have I not seen you before—I cannot remember where?" said Mrs. Sparkleton, at last, in her most condescending and mellifluous tones.

"She is mostly here, ma'am, and perhaps you may have seen her before, or

been a purchaser. Miss Green's customers are sure to come back," replied Miss Dishnap, observing that Charity visibly hesitated.

"Miss Green!—Green—Green?—Can it really be? I must surely be mistaken! —Have you a sister, or any relation called Patience, I believe, that lives with a lady of the name of Gullibull, at Putney?"

"My name is Charity—but I have left Mrs. Gullibull's some time!" faltered the young girl.

"Indeed!—Why, I thought you were a niece, or some relation of that sort!" observed Mrs. Sparkleton, with evident surprise and some trepidation. "Do you remember me?—And how strange it is that Lord Fitzhauton—I accidentally met his lordship as I was making some purchases in the bazaar—should not have known of your being here?"

"Miss Green is not at present on very good terms with her relations, madam," said Miss Dishnap.

"Ah! that is the reason why you did not speak!—or were you not in the stall?" returned Mrs. Sparkleton, with very considerable anxiety. "You heard his lordship's voice, did you not?"

Charity felt excessively confused—almost dizzy. But the kindness and timidity of her character would not suffer her to inflict any pain on others which she could possibly prevent. She replied, in a quivering tone—"I heard a voice, but I did not like to look round, because the whole family have discarded me on account—on account—because the son and I—because Mr. Midas and I disagreed."

"I will see you reconciled some day—I am told I have some influence there," said Mrs. Sparkleton, playfully—but with considerable anxiety. "Yet we spoke in whispers—we hardly spoke above our breath," she thought,—"and this girl seems half deaf—and very simple, almost to stupidity. Besides, she could only conclude, if she heard anything, that we were

discussing some matter of business—and she is at variance with all that set."

Nevertheless, it occurred to her that it would be as well to conciliate the goodwill of the young lacewoman. It would be amusing also to wear a veil which she could tell every one was bought by her in a bazaar, of Lady Fitzhauton's cousin.

"I remember you asked me something about the value of lace at Mrs. Gullibull's," she said in the sweetest tones of her winning voice. "I had no idea that you had any dispute with the family at the time; but I really do not think the lace dear at ten guineas. Send it to my house this evening, if you please; and I shall be very happy if you will also make me a blonde lace veil, three times as long, with lilies and myrtle in the pattern, for a wedding I am to be at, very shortly."

Charity bowed with peculiar stiffness, and mechanically took out her little pocket-book,—which was her whole machinery of bookkeeping,—as if to enter the order.

But her hand trembled so, that she feared to attempt pencilling the words. Luckily Miss Dishnap mistook the cause of her hesitation.

"What name and address, madam?"

"Mrs. Sparkleton — the Honourable Mrs. Sparkleton, ——— Street, Belgrave-square," replied the lady, delighted to find she was forgotten; and with an affable smile and nod she took her departure.

Göethe likens the tremendous office imposed on the kindly and inactive nature of Hamlet, to an oak planted in a flower-pot, which it splits and rends in the growth. A bad comparison with regard to the vasty mind of the philosophic prince, but a good illustration of poor Charity's —with such a secret as the one she had unwillingly acquired at work within it. Miss Dishnap—herself given to long reveries—wondered at the profound thought in which she continued buried for a considerable time after Mrs. Sparkleton's disappearance. Her features also were

agitated, and, at times, tears strained through the lids which vainly endeavoured to suppress them. At first, Miss Dishnap imagined that the apparition of the fine lady whom she had known in her uncle's house had forced upon her more painfully than usual the change in her circumstances. But at last she remembered that Mr. Midas Gullibull's new intended was called Sparkleton, and thought she could account for the disturbance visible in her young friend's demeanour. Still she was too delicate to make any observation.

By and by Charity began to grow more composed; the drops ceased to distil from her eyes; and some feeling of an unwontedly earnest and resolved character impressed itself upon her countenance. Miss Dishnap silently bemused what it could be; and she was altogether unprepared for what—with all her partiality—she could not help considering a display of meanness of spirit, when Charity suddenly

rose, and said she felt tired of work, and would take the veil home before tea.

"But you have had no dinner yet, and it is four o'clock!" said Miss Dishnap, glancing at the great dial of the bazaar. "And you really intend to take Mrs. Sparkleton's money, though that fellow, Midas——"

"She has bought the veil, and has a right to it; and I have such a dreadful headache, I cannot eat, or work," replied Charity; and hastily arranging the lace in a parcel, and putting on her bonnet and shawl, she made her way from the bazaar into the street.

CHAPTER VI.

We have often been obliged indirectly to apologise to people who know the world for Miss Green's singular demeanour in it. But how shall we excuse the ridiculous romance of the project which had now taken possession of her ideas, or even make a reader of sense believe in the probability of so foolish a piece of generosity as she was about to perpetrate? What revenge more complete could any woman have desired on a faithless lover than that which apparently awaited Midas Gullibull?—on a rival, than that which she should have it in her power to inflict on Mrs. Sparkleton! —on a whole family which had treated her

with such neglect and contumely, than to permit the disgrace and anguish pretty certain to follow to all the parties involved in the guilty intrigue she should have it in her power to divulge?

Yet Charity Green was now taking her deliberate way—not to Mrs. Sparkleton's house—but to Madame Millefleurs', determined to use the lace veil as a pretext for an interview with the former lady, in which she might confess what she had overheard, and exhort her to shun the dangerous interview projected, under a solemn promise of secrecy in case she relinquished all future correspondence with the young nobleman, her cousin's husband. She had little doubt that Mrs. Sparkleton would then, at once, either resolve to quit the scene of her danger, or marry Midas; in whose guardian care there was little fear that she could go astray, or that much intercourse would continue with the Fitzhautons. At all events a great sin would be prevented, in Charity's unfashionable

apprehension; and her tedious sacrifice might at length be consummated.

Charity conducted herself in the affair with a coolness and resolution which she did not often display in others of more directly personal moment; she took up her station with her parcel in a doorway which commanded the front of Madame Mille-fleurs' house, and waited until she saw Mrs. Sparkleton's carriage drive up. Her heart, it is true, a little failed her when she beheld her splendid rival alight, exquisitely dressed, enter the house, and order her vehicle to return, as she said she meant to walk home through the Park. Charity gave her only just time to mount the stairs, when she followed, and rung the bell at the just-closed door.

A porter, full as proud as the "proud porter" of the dolorous ballad of the Lord Bateman, opened it. He regarded Charity with a nose turned up by nature, but still farther elevated by a supercilious leer, and inquired her business. She was told, she

said, to bring a veil to the lady who had just entered, and desired to be allowed to follow her up stairs. The proud porter stared at her rather incredulously, motioned to a hall chair, whispered something up a pipe, and resumed his own seat in wicker sedan, and a morning journal which he had just laid down.

Charity had hopes that Lord Fitzhauton had not yet arrived; and being no great proficient in intrigue, she was also impressed with the innocent conviction that he would be sure to enter at the front door, where she sate sentry. Nevertheless, she felt the value of every instant of time, and was fretted with the most anxious desire to obtain admittance to Mrs. Sparkleton; and, after waiting about ten minutes in the utmost impatience, she renewed her request to the porter, and declared that she must see the lady immediately.

"*Must* is for the king, or the queen, I should say; and you an't quite everything

yourself, I suppose?" said the porter, with mocking gravity. "If your business is so hot, you must wait till it cools; at all events, I can't give an answer till I get one." And he resumed, with much relish, the perusal of a leading article, commenting with great severity on the foreign policy of the moment, in which, it seemed, he falsified the general complaint of journalists, and took great interest.

Twenty minutes elapsed, and then Charity's anxiety could no longer be controlled. She remembered to have heard or read of the efficacy of a peculiar ointment applied to the palms of servitors, of high and low degree alike, and trembling lest it should be considered an insult by the grandly liveried functionary, she put a half-crown into his hand, and begged so earnestly he would procure her admittance to the lady, that he was surprised.

"Who is she? If she hasn't got the goods, you needn't be afraid! And if she has, and is one of our customers, she is

sure not to be a bilk—a regular one, at least, young woman," he said, accepting the half-crown with the dignity of a minister receiving on a treasury-warrant.

"No, I don't think that at all! I don't think I'm to be cheated. It is the Honourable Mrs. Sparkleton; but I *must* see her about—about another piece of lace—immediately."

"Oh, if it's *her*,—I don't wonder you would like ready money. Between you and me and the wall, Miss, most people would rather have her money than her note, and as you seem a sensible young woman—" he moved again to his pipe of communication, and called the message louder up it—"A young woman with some lace had been ordered to call and see the Honourable Mrs. Sparkleton immediately." Then listening for a brief pause, he turned, and with a bland smile repeated the reply. "Mrs. Sparkleton is *not* in the Magazin, and is not at all expected to-day."

"But she must be—I saw her myself

go in," said Charity, with vehemence. "She is in the house, and I must and I will see her."

"*Is* there anything up? It an't shoplifting, is it?" exclaimed the porter, in astonishment.

"Mrs. Sparkleton—steal!" said Charity, half bewildered. "But perhaps they think she don't want to see me. Say that I was to come *by appointment*,—say that I *know* she is here!—say anything, so that I may get to see her."

This second message duly transmitted up the leaden telegraph, produced the personal descent of a messenger from the upper regions, in the shape of a young French girl, who seemed glad of any pretence to descend, she tripped down so cheerfully. "Madame desires to inform *la jeune personne* dat she is a mistake. Dere is no Madame Spark—Spark—I cannot spik de word. Nobody of de name at all ever come here." And with a smile and a curtsy she was about to trip up again,

after the delivery of this clear notification, when Charity exclaimed—"Let me see Madame Millefleurs herself then. I insist upon it! Tell her that I will else expose —say, I *must* see Mrs. Sparkleton, or it will be the worse for you all!"

"Goodness!—these fine ladies have taken to prigging in style now-a-days! It may be worth all our whiles to hold our tongues—I'll go up myself and deliver the message," said the porter, aghast, but not insensible to the views of interest opened. "What is the name of the shop?—What *has* she prigged?"

"Let me see Madame Millefleurs, that is all," replied Charity; and the proud porter, laying aside the stately stiffness of his customary manner, rushed up the stairs. The young French girl instantly began a babble about the weather, and the park, and the new fashions from Paris, in broken English, to entertain her visitor But Charity took no manner of notice of what she said, and the porter returned so

fast, that there was no occasion to feign much. Permission was given to the strange young woman to go up stairs. "But mind what you say," he observed; "There's a gentleman there, and Madame looked vexed because I mentioned the lady's name before him."

The French milliner guided Charity upstairs, into one of the rooms of the first great suite in which Madame Millefleurs displayed her manufactures. An elegantly carpeted drawing-room, furnished *à la* Louis Quatorze, in a rich and profusely gilded style, was the apartment into which Charity was ushered. It was here that Madame Millefleurs stored her treasures of costumes and authorities for fancy balls, which were, at that time, the vogue. And here Charity found the great *Modiste* engaged in a pleasant chit-chat on the subject of some fancy dresses which some ladies "had done him the honour to request him to choose for them," with no less refined and tasteful a personage than —Viscount Deville.

His lordship's rank and business were of themselves the most powerful recommendations to favour with the *marchande de modes*. But, in addition, he was a nobleman of so insinuating an address, seemed to have so little of the English aristocratic morgue, spoke "French of Paris" so fluently, was so thoroughly well acquainted with all the sayings and doings, and remarkabilities of that capital, that Madame Millefleurs was in positive ecstasies with him. He had already spent a considerable time at his task, and meant to spend a good deal longer, when Charity Green was ushered in.

Charity instantly recollected the name and rank of the personage before her, and her embarrassment increased, until she perceived,—or thought she perceived,—that he did not recognise her in turn. Perhaps his lordship had forgotten her; but whether he had or not, he was equally certain not to recognise her, even with his eyes, until he had satisfied himself that it would be convenient to do so.

"What is dat you say? I tell you dere is no Madame Sparkleton here! She was once buy of me, but not now. You are *importune.* I sell my *dentelles* myself. Why do you bring wood to de forest?" said Madame Millefleurs, eyeing the applicant with extreme anxiety.

"I know Mrs. Sparkleton is in your house, ma'am, I saw her come in with my own eyes,—and I must speak with her, to prevent—I want to speak to her on the most important and urgent business!" returned Charity Green, very firmly.

"Mrs. Sparkleton!" repeated his lordship. "I was not quite certain when I heard the name a few moments ago. It is a lady who, I am proud to say, is a most particular friend of mine. My name is Deville—Viscount Deville,—and if the young woman is charged with any parcel for Mrs. Sparkleton, she may confide it without scruple."

"Entendez-vous? his lordship is your *acution!*" said Madame Millefleurs, with a

wave of the hand, signifying that the case was dismissed.

"No; I must see Mrs. Sparkleton herself—I must, and I will!" returned the applicant.

"Is she écervelée? Is she out of her *scentses?*" exclaimed Madame Millefleurs. "Allez-vous-en—go dis moment—or I send for a police that take you to prison."

"It will be better for you not,—better for every one. Only let me see Mrs. Sparkleton for an instant,—let me save her; let me speak to you, Madame Millefleurs, only one moment, by yourself!" implored Charity, so passionately, that Madame Millefleurs was very much alarmed, and the viscount was also struck with an apprehension that some foil to his scheme was in preparation.

"I should certainly recommend you, Madame,—this young person seems very extraordinarily excited—I should certainly *not* recommend you to introduce her to an interview, even if Mrs. Sparkleton should accidentally be in the house," he said.

"But she is not, I assure — on my honneur!" replied Madame Millefleurs, with vehemence.

"I know no reason why she should *not* be. What could be more simple than that a lady should be at her milliner's?" replied his lordship. "But from the excited manner of this young woman—and I have some indistinct recollection to have seen her in a family, for the amiable heir of which she may possibly have formed some attachment—and I am but too well aware that he is an aspirant to Mrs. Sparkleton's notice,—it might not be altogether expedient to admit her to the interview she so peremptorily demands."

"You hear! Leave my house immediately, or I give you into keep of de police for a nuisance, to take care of;" said Madame Millefleurs, with violence, finding herself so efficiently supported.

"Then you will cause her ruin, and the ruin of a whole family, and the destruction of their souls, perhaps! Don't be so

wicked, Madame!" exclaimed Charity. "I cannot explain my meaning before this gentleman; but *do* let me speak to you alone, Madame."

"What is the meaning of this, Madame Millefleurs? This does seem a little singular," said the viscount, modulating his voice to a very strong expression of suspicion. "Excuse me, Madame, but I have relations with Mrs. Sparkleton, which perhaps authorise me to demand an explanation of these words."

"What explication, when she is mad? Send for a gendarme—I will give her into custody, if she goes not this moment," said the *marchande*, stamping on the ground with rage. "*Robert! Robert!* some one go for a gendarme."

Charity was greatly alarmed at this menace. The dreadful idea of being dragged along the streets as a malefactor, to a station-house, was alone sufficient to strike her with dismay. And she felt, moreover, that she could offer no excuse

for her extraordinary conduct, but what would defeat its purpose, or seem like a libellous exaggeration of her offence. But a thought occurred to her, and we almost wonder how it did, to endeavour, in an indirect manner, to excite the apprehensions of Madame Millefleurs.

"Let me see Lord Fitzhauton, then—Mr. Gullibull's brother-in-law—I know he is here," she exclaimed; and in reality Madame Millefleurs was thrown into a state of indescribable agitation by the words.

"Lord Fitzhauton here!—It is one great—one great—what you call *un chaperon faux*—a false hood! What for his lordsheep come to my house? *Suis-je personne de la sorte?* I will not be insult—chez moi—in my own house. *Robert!*" and she bawled with all the force of her sharp-edged Parisian voice down the pipe. "*Robert,*—come and rid me of *cette créature infame qui veut déshonnerer ta maitresse!*"

The proud porter would no doubt have responded with zeal to the summons,—Lord Deville had just got into the middle of a suggestion, that perhaps his lordship had arranged to meet *Lady Fitzhauton* at Madame Millefleurs' establishment—when a thundering knock shook the house, and announced an arrival of importance. "Ah, she wishes to make me *infame!*—to show policemen in my house. Who is dis?—Let her wait till I speak with Madame Rat-tat-tat-tat! But no, non,—*Robert*,—I am abroad;" but almost as this order was telegraphed, Madame Rat-tat-tat-tat entered the presence which she was to be denied, having rushed past the porter and flown up the stairs, in the space occupied to prohibit her admission.

The consternation of Charity Green was perhaps not much less than that of Madame Millefleurs herself, when she recognised the infuriated countenance of Lady Fitzhauton, who was undoubtedly out of what little reason she ever possessed, with passion!

She took no notice apparently of any one present but Madame Millefleurs, to whom she exclaimed, in tones that quivered with rage, "Where is Mrs. Sparkleton!—where is my husband, you vile woman, you! Show me where they are, or I will—I will call in the police! I will have them up before the Lord Mayor! Let me see them this moment, you wretch, you!—you wicked Frenchwoman!—you disgraceful creature, you! You deserve to be indicted, and you shall be, for harbouring such monsters!"

Madame Millefleurs' better judgment and self possession almost deserted her in this dreadful exigency; for, coupling the apparition of the jealous wife with that of Charity Green, she had little doubt that the interview between Lord Fitzhauton and Mrs. Sparkleton, under her roof, was discovered, and viewed in a very unpleasant light. But her genius only deserted her for a moment. "Ah, miladi!—what for *tant de colère?* They scrutinise my

accounts together in the Salon de Coiffure!
—milor pay me; and they demand of me,—'Do not mention it, because Madame wishes no one to know she is forced to borrow of milor!'"

"Show me to them—I'll account with them!" returned Lady Fitzhauton.

"I strongly advise you, Madame, to let her ladyship witness, with her own eyes, the perfectly harmless nature of this interview," said Deville, in his calm, mocking tones.

"Dis young *personne* can witness! Ah, miss, do you not bring lace to show to Madame Spark at dis moment?" said the modiste, turning with a very altered visage, to Charity Green.

"To save her, as you said, from ruin and degradation?" chimed in the viscount.

"She!—who are you, woman?—Charity Green!" exclaimed Lady Fitzhauton, in extreme surprise. "Why, you told me yourself about them! You told me they meant to behave to me as they have done

—to cheat me, to make a fool of me! And I know what you want now with your false evidence in her favour! You want her to marry Midas, that you may bring your action against him! But I know the Salon de Coiffure,—I'll find them, if they kill me!"

And Lady Fitzhauton flew out of the room in a delirium of rage, which gave every reason to apprehend the worst consequences, if not to herself, from herself. Madame Millefleurs stood petrified; Lord Deville did not offer to move; and only Charity Green darted out after the furious wife, to endeavour to prevent the tragical consequences which might well be apprehended. But she only reached the bottom of the stairs, down which Lady Fitzhauton had rushed, with, apparently, a good knowledge of the topography of the house, at the instant when her ladyship dashed open the door of the Salon de Coiffure; and there, indeed, at a central table of many, all covered with bonnets and caps, and

artificial flowers innumerable, sate Mrs. Sparkleton—the books of the firm open before her, and her own very long accounts scattered over the board. And that would have been all very well, only Lord Fitzhauton was kneeling quite closely at her feet, with both her hands clasped in his—one of his arms around her waist—and pouring forth some wild rhapsody intermingled with still wilder kisses, to which Mrs. Sparkleton, who was weeping profusely, seemed to have resigned herself! Lady Fitzhauton had the pleasure to catch the following words, for the accountants were too much absorbed to notice her entry at the first moment, violent as it was:—"Nay, you cannot, you shall not, any longer deny that you love me! Love dimples all your smiles—sparkles in your eyes—waves in your tresses—makes all your movements music—makes an atmosphere of roses wherever you are! Only say it,—only confess it,—say, 'Charles, I love you!'"

"Yes, Charles, I do love you! But leave me; you will destroy me! Do you not love me too? It is all I ask!—love me better than all the world?"

"A million, million times! I would say so before the universe with pride; and——"

"Will you say so before me, you wicked, wicked wretch! you traitor! you vile man!" said a voice, half inarticulate with passion; and a form appeared, infinitely little expected, and infinitely less desired, at this moment. As was but polite, both parties arose to receive the visitor, but with an instantaneous start, and a fixity of position and look, when they had risen, not usually remarked in good society. We really do not think that Mrs. Sparkleton's bust of fine Carrara marble, which her enamoured spouse caused to be executed, looked much whiter or more rigid than herself on this memorable occasion, which she would by no means have selected to sit for her likeness in.

Something vulgar would have followed; —yes, Lady Fitzhauton, without any manner of doubt, would have *flown at* Mrs. Sparkleton; she would have scratched her, torn her bonnet, and, in fact, bemauled her —as if she had not been the Honourable Mrs. Sparkleton—as if she herself had not been the Right Honourable Lady Fitzhauton—but simply a jealous woman and her rival, in that inferior class of society which takes its name from the merchandise it sells, which merchandise is fish. Something vulgar would most decidedly have happened, on one side at least; for Mrs. Sparkleton might be considered *as hors de combat* in one sense, with terror and surprise—if Lord Fitzhauton had not recovered his self-possession in time to rush between the belligerents—this attacking England, and this defenceless Greece! He managed to catch Lady Fitzhauton in his arms in her onward rush, and to hold her. "My dear Lady Fitzhauton, listen to reason! What is the matter?

We are only looking over some long accounts which——"

"Yes, from the time you were in Paris, from the time you were in Paris! Let me go! Papa!—Mamma!—Lord Deville!—let me go!" shrieked Lady Fitzhauton.

"My dearest, I do assure you, on my honour as a gentleman——"

"O, madame, believe me—on my *honneur*, you may believe me,—I am most *respectable!*" said Madame Millefleurs, who had now rushed in.

"I will believe nobody. I will believe my own eyes and my own ears! I will kill her!"

"Mrs. Sparkleton, make your escape, pray; leave me to explain matters, or this violent woman will be at you!" said Fitzhauton, excessively agitated, and obliged to exert all his strength to restrain his wife's fury.

"Oh, yes, yes; let there be no *fracas* in my house—no *combat!*" implored Madame Millefleurs.

"Lady Fitzhauton, in the name of heaven! . . ." faltered Mrs. Sparkleton, "Do not condemn me because appearances. . . . It was imprudent indeed to borrow money of your husband—but my railway speculations—I can make it clearly appear—it was necessary to explain for what reasons——"

"You had better go, Geraldine!" interrupted Lord Fitzhauton. "This mad woman never had a particle of reason in her quietest moments—and now—I really can't hold her if you don't go!"

"I will explain all, the moment Lady Fitzhauton——" began Mrs. Sparkleton.

"For God's sake go, ma'am, or she will kill herself in this paroxysm of fury," implored Charity.

"No, she will not kill herself—no, she will not oblige her husband and friends so much!" returned Lady Fitzhauton, with ironical fury. "Don't fancy it, Miss Green! She will live to take her revenge! —to expose this fine lady—this duke's

granddaughter — to the scorn of the world! I'll be divorced in the House of Lords, and everybody will be sure to read that in the papers,—so be sure and take in the *Morning Post* the day after to-morrow, Mrs. Sparkleton!"

"Don't drive them to desperation!—Lady Fitzhauton, consider!" said Charity Green. "Do go, Mrs. Sparkleton, and I'll try and soothe her, and reason with her, to forgive you, if you will promise never to speak to him again."

"I will—I do—best of creatures! I'll give you a thousand pounds—anything—if you will!" said Mrs. Sparkleton, almost out of her senses with fear and confusion; and, finding that there was no hope of obtaining a hearing, she complied with the very general desire of the company, and, with a look of speechless despair and entreaty at Lady Fitzhauton, which might have moved to mercy any fury but that of jealousy, clasping her hands, wringing them, and bursting into a frenzy of hysteric grief, she made her exit.

She believed afterwards—her senses were so disordered—that she was fairly lunatic for some moments, during which she thought she distinctly heard the voice of Lord Deville as she passed an open door in her flight, saying, in an equable and calm tone, to the young French girl who had remained in attendance on him— "Yes, that oriental garb will admirably suit the dark and somewhat Hebrew character of the lady Jemima's beauty, who wishes to personate the late Sir Walter Scott's Rebecca. Her younger sister will go as the Morning Star; her mother——" but the rest of the sentence was not heard by Mrs. Sparkleton.

Meanwhile her escape had added to Lady Fitzhauton's exasperation, and she burst into such a torrent of positively abusive words and epithets at her husband, that, culpable as he was, his own naturally violent and headstrong spirit was roused to equal exasperation. In vain did Charity Green and Madame Millefleurs endeavour, by interposing all sorts of

arguments and entreaties, to calm them. Husband and wife were alike deaf to counsel or imploration; and Fitzhauton, who had at first endeavoured to appease his consort with apologies and promises, now answered her reproaches and threats with defiance and scorn. And as soon as he felt assured of Mrs. Sparkleton's safety, he lost all regard for decency or command over his temper; and telling her ladyship—entering into the spirit of one of her menaces—that the sooner she released him from bonds he detested, by procuring a divorce, the better, he flung out of the room, and out of the house. Then, finding no object left on which to wreak her wrath, and overcome by the passions thus deprived of vent, Lady Fitzhauton fainted away in the arms of Charity Green.

Madame Millefleurs protesting, in accents of despair, that she was ruined for ever—that her *réputation* was destroyed—that no lady would dare ever again set foot in her house—rendered but very little

assistance. Nevertheless Charity managed to get Lady Fitzhauton to a sofa, where she sunk back insensible, and then applied herself to give her all the assistance possible. She knew that Lady Fitzhauton always carried a smelling-bottle, and sought for it in her pocket; and, while rummaging, an unexpected and undesired ally appeared in the person of Lord Deville. But he set himself to work with such activity and judgment, in reviving Lady Fitzhauton, that Charity could not well express any dissatisfaction. Only, when her ladyship revived, she was both disgusted and surprised with the profusion and caressing familiarity of the viscount's kind attentions.

"Thank God, she revives! her beautiful eyes beam once more upon me!—Dearest, live, if for no other reason than that you may not kill me too!" he exclaimed, seating himself beside her, and supporting her with his arm, so that her head rested on his shoulder. "Believe me, there is still

one heart wholly yours, wholly devoted to you!.... Sweetest, *he* is unworthy of a single one of these precious tears—cease, then, to weep, I beseech you!"

"O, Lord Deville, was ever any person treated as I am?" sobbed Lady Fitzhauton. "And now, very likely he is gone to run away with her!"

"Not if you will take my advice—if you will recal him to you by moderation, by kindness, by forgiveness!" interposed Charity. "Only go home, dear Lady Fitzhauton, and send me to him with some message of the sort, and I know he will return to you very gladly."

"You are in the conspiracy, too, you ungrateful creature, you!" retorted the wrongheaded peeress. "And it is horrible of you, after all we have done for you; after feeding, and clothing, and sheltering you for I don't know how many years, to turn like a serpent and sting one cousin, in order that you may rob the other! But Midas shall never marry her;

I will make her infamous wherever she goes!"

Charity was silent; but Madame Millefleurs made amends. "Ah, of what consequence is it to be *innocente* in this *culpable* world?" she exclaimed. "It is all one *grande méprise*—for dere is no affaire with milor and Madame."

"You do not know her; you are *very* innocent, Madame Millefleurs, and judge from the innocence of your own heart," replied his lordship, ironically. "*You* cannot tell how deceitful women are, being one yourself."

"To spik so of Madame—so good to all the world!" wept Millefleurs.

"Too good for me, then," said Deville, with a bitter smile.

"Non, milor! she is no better den she should be!" replied the marchande, with zealous vivacity.

"Ha, ha, your random bolt has, I believe, hit the mark," said his lordship, with a studied air of gloom. "But I

have a right, Madame Millefleurs—mark you, a right!—to obtain a confirmation of the dreadful suspicions which this scene has forced upon me! I had some reason to believe myself an acceptable suitor to Mrs. Sparkleton—as all the world is aware—and I request to be allowed a few minutes private audience with Lady Fitz-hauton, to ascertain the reason of her conduct, and decide upon my own."

"But *la jalousie* wear always yellow spectacles—show all things yellow!—Do not look through them, milor!" entreated the modiste.

"Leave me to form my own conclusions, or I shall imagine you have some culpable collusion in this extraordinary affair!" said Deville, with vehemence. "Leave me to compare notes with Lord Fitzhauton's wife, and no longer torment me with your presence!"

"Come, mademoiselle!—you can bear *témoignage* all was right—andyou will take a glass of wine with me! I render homage

to de integrité of your motifs!" exclaimed Madame Millefleurs, gracefully offering her hand to Charity Green, as if to escort her honourably from the apartment. But Charity did not so readily accept the olive branch.

"My motives are my own—I do not ask any one to bear witness to their rightfulness. But I will not leave this lady, my cousin, until I see her in some safe protection!" she said, with an energy and determination of which she did not usually exhibit any signs.

"I am in safe protection!—Lord Deville will protect me; will you not, my lord?" said Lady Fitzhauton, with the implicit confidence of the sheep in the shepherd, who feeds to devour it.

"With my life, dearest one!"

"And I am not your cousin at all! I told you so when you disgraced the family by going to that bazaar; and although your mother was mamma's sister, it is nothing to me," said Lady Fitzhauton.

"So, go; for I want nothing with you—and I want to speak with Lord Deville, that I may know how to bring the wretches to punishment."

"Cousin or none, I declare before Heaven and all who hear me, that I will not leave you for a single instant until I have placed you under your father's care!" returned Charity, with surprising firmness. "Then, you can hold what conference you please with Lord Deville; but, until then, I will not stir an inch from your side, and I will scream murder if any one attempts to make me!"

"What is your reason for this very singular resolution, madam?" said Lord Deville, drawing himself to his full height, and putting all the terrors of a Scandalum Magnatum into his aristocratic physiognomy. But the attempt to overawe only roused Charity's indignation to a less governable heat.

"What is my reason!—Dare you ask it, sir, when I have seen you from the

very beginning of your acquaintance doing all you possibly could to set Lady Fitzhauton against her husband—with no good intention, I am sure, to herself!"

Lord Deville was considerably struck, as well with the words, as with the immoveable determination which characterized the look and attitude of Charity Green. His lordship's knowledge of mankind was too profound for him not to conclude, that now this seemingly soft and wavering character had stiffened, like water into ice, its impressions, whatever they were, would not easily be removed.

"Yes, this young woman is most decidedly in the conspiracy against you—but she is right, in one sense," he observed, after a pause. "It may, perhaps, be better, my dearest Lady Fitzhauton, that our explanation should take place in your kind mother's presence. She, at least, suspects no ill of me! I will not even hand you to your carriage, lest a breath should countenance this unfeeling woman's

aspersions! But in the afternoon I will do myself the very great honour and happiness of seeing you at Putney."

"Yes, for I will never go home again, until he begs me on his knees to do so!—And I will expose her everywhere this very instant—but Miss Green shall not go with me!"

"But I WILL, Lady Fitzhauton! you shall not hinder me! If you will not let me go home with you, I will take a cab and follow your carriage until I see you fairly in! What might people say or think if you were left in this house with this wicked man?" returned Charity.

"Hélas! ma réputation!" sighed Madame Millefleurs. "No one shall stay in it!—leave my house, all de world!"

Finding at last that Charity was inflexibly bent on seeing her cousin safely home, the viscount thought it best to seem to aid in her purpose; and, with much persuasion, he finally prevailed on Lady Fitzhauton, though with very great re-

luctance, to accept the proposed escort, and even to allow Charity a place in her carriage. This concession had the usual effect on the simple goodness of the latter's heart, and made her almost doubt whether her suspicions had not wronged Lord Deville. The cautious peer even refrained, as he had said, from handing Lady Fitzhauton to her carriage—into which Charity Green followed her in profound silence, after witnessing a parting which restored her apprehensions to their fullest strength.

CHAPTER VII.

DURING a considerable portion of the journey, Lady Fitzhauton took no notice of her companion, who modestly sat with her back to the horses, and as much out of her sight as possible, in the opposite corner of the vehicle. Her ladyship spent the time chiefly in ejaculations against "the wretch," and in terrible menaces of how she would "do her trick for her" at court, so that she should never again dare to show her face at a drawing-room—never get another invitation to a state-ball—to the royal theatricals, or royal concerts—or anything respectable of any sort, anywhere! or else she remained in a

sullen fit of silence—which was greatly preferred by Charity Green, who feared the coachman and footman were auditors of much that was said.

At last it occurred to her ladyship to inquire by what means Miss Green had made one in the recent scene, and how she dared pretend to bear witness, as Madame Millefleurs had said, to the propriety of the interview between Lord Fitzhauton and "that wretch?" Charity calmly replied, that she had borne no such testimony, and thought it was on the contrary a very wrong and foolish thing for them to meet. But, unwilling to enrage Lady Fitzhauton farther against her rival, she quietly, but resolutely, persisted in refusing to say how she happened to be in at the detection.

This refusal obtained her an invitation into the Gullibull mansion, which she would probably not otherwise have received. "Then I am determined, since you have come so far, whether I will or

not, that you shall go in, and we shall soon see whether you will dare to hide the truth from mamma!"

Charity would fain have declined; she feared, in the delicacy of her sentiments, that it would seem as if she came to enjoy the humiliation and discomfiture of the relatives who had treated her so ill. But the obstinacy of Lady Fitzhauton, and her own dislike to exciting observation, forced her to comply; and, with a throbbing heart, she once more mounted those grandly carpeted stairs to Mrs. Gullibull's presence.

No other personage would have had much chance of obtaining admittance to it on this day. Mrs. Gullibull was superintending the most extensive preparations for a ball which she meant to give in celebration of the first anniversary of her daughter's wedding-day. Her drawing-rooms were in the hands of upholsterers, who were engaged in re-gilding the ornamental cornices, and in fixing some arti-

cles of splendid luxury in the shape of mirror-blinds of the finest plate-glass, which, being drawn up at night, would multiply the illuminations and coup-d'œil in every direction. Assisted by a competent staff of housemaids, Mrs. Gullibull was personally engaged in trying the effect of various patterns of satin-damask on the furniture it was to cover.

"Lawkamercy, Ann, is that you? and, goodness gracious me! *is* that Charity with you?" exclaimed Mrs. Gullibull, in very great surprise. "Well, I thought she'd come to her senses, by and by, on bread and water! It's kind enough of you to take her part, however; and as she may be useful to me just at present, if she will promise to be a good girl henceforth——"

"O, mamma, do let me speak to you by yourself! I have something to tell you," interrupted Lady Fitzhauton, gaspingly.

"Well, but the man's waiting, and I

want to decide. Give me your candid opinion on these damasks, Ann, for it's for a *feete* on your wedding-day, and I want something that will suit Mrs. Sparkleton's complexion, too, as she's to have it all by and by."

"Don't speak of her, mamma; it makes me sick to hear her mentioned. Oh, she has turned out such a wretch that——"

"But do go with your mamma into the next room before you tell her anything!" interposed Charity.

"Why, lawkadaisy, what can it be?" ejaculated Mrs. Gullibull, getting much alarmed, as she observed the agitation and paleness of the two young women. "What's the matter? Don't break it to me too suddenly—but what's it? Is his lordship pitched off that vicious brute of his that he will ride in spite of every one?"

Lady Fitzhauton made no reply, until they walked into the next chamber—once the loft over a stable, now trans-

formed into a magnificent boudoir. But the moment they had entered, almost before Charity could close the door on the marvelling upholsterers, she burst into a renewed hysterical flood of tears, exclaiming, "O, mamma, mamma, you cannot tell how I have been served; and after all papa has done for him!"

"Do tell me what's the matter! tell me, Charity, for I do feel as if I should have a 'plexy or the rheumatis' in my back, if you don't speak out at once!" exclaimed Mrs. Gullibull.

"It is something about Lord Fitzhauton and Mrs. Sparkleton," said the charitable Charity, soothingly. "They met to arrange some affairs rather privately, at your dressmaker's, ma'am, and Lady Fitzhauton did not like it."

"O, mamma, she is as bad as they are, to want to gloss over things in that way!" cried Lady Fitzhauton; and largely intermingling her narrative with invective against her cousin, she gave a broken, but

sufficiently intelligible and highly-coloured account of the whole affair.

The painter who covered the face of Agamemnon assisting at the sacrifice of Iphigenia, from despair of expressing its agony, took a very convenient way to escape trouble, which we should be happy to imitate in Mrs. Gullibull's case. Indeed, it would scarcely be in the power of colours—much less of pen and ink—to depict the variety of emotions which rent her maternal bosom during the whole course of the narrative. The comparison of the lioness robbed of her young, is a little trite, perhaps, but might else have nicely served the purpose of illustration. "And now, mamma!" concluded Lady Fitzhauton, "I only want you to help me in one thing; I want you to have me divorced, and get me my fortune back again—for I hate him so, I shall never endure the sight of him again!"

"Oh, the slut, the creature! Who ever would have thought it!—The *honourable*

Mrs. Sparkleton, indeed!—And to do us all so—my poor boy, too!—he'll die of a broken heart!" sobbed Mrs. Gullibull, as if she herself were in danger of a similar catastrophe.

"But things are not so very bad yet, ma'am," said Charity, gently. "No good could be done by blasting Mrs. Sparkleton's character. There is no great harm done yet, and perhaps if—if Mr. Midas would marry Mrs. Sparkleton——"

"How dare you talk of my brother marrying such a creature?" interrupted Lady Fitzhauton, furiously. "Do you think he is such a mean-spirited creature as yourself, that will take up with everybody's leavings?—She only comes to insult us, mamma, and to make fun of our misery!—She only wants Midas to marry that she may bring her action—and that is why she puts herself forward as a cover-slut for Mrs. Sparkleton!—I tell you, mamma, that, besides, Mrs. Sparkleton was always making a fool of you behind your

back, and laughing and mimicking you, even when I was there!"

"Law, my dear, what could the woman find to mimic in me?" said Mrs. Gullibull, with much increased indignation. "But if there's justice to be had for love or money, you shall have it!—And as for the person there, that has the conscience to speak up for a creature of that sort, it convinces me that she is very little better herself! And so I should like to know, miss, what business you have in my house, after I had p'rumptory bid you never darken my doorstone again?"

"She forced herself upon me, mamma—I could not possibly get rid of her!" ejaculated Lady Fitzhauton.

"It is true—I would not leave you until I saw you safe from the snares of the wicked man who intends to make you as bad, or a good deal worse, than Mrs. Sparkleton!" said Chastity, with much emotion. "I am going now, Mrs. Gullibull; but, before I go, I solemnly warn

you not to suffer that Lord Deville to have any access to your daughter—ever to see her—for I am more convinced than ever that he has a bad design upon her!"

"O, mamma! do you hear that?—she will sell herself to those wretches to bear false witness against me, that I may never get a divorce, or marry again!"

"It's all of a piece with the rest of her scandalous behaviour!" shouted Mrs. Gullibull. "She set that old fool, Bagshawe, against the whole family, and poor Midas in particular. She's the artfullest slut that ever lived—I'll say it—though it was my folly encouraged her in her poisonous doings so long; for Bagshawe himself had the impudence to tell me that he proposed to her, and that she rejected him—I have no doubt, purely to insult us, because he was a friend of ours, and to set us all by the ears; for would any poor girl in her senses——Quit my house this instant, you wicked girl, for it was you that caused the

whole quarrel! And if ever you dare to enter it again-

"Heyday! what's all this blustering about?" interrupted a personage, who entered the apartment at this moment, rather hastily, hearing the voice of Mrs. Gullibull raised to so excited a pitch. It was Alderman Gullibull; and, agitated as she was, Charity could not help noticing, with surprise and sorrow, the careworn, haggard look of her usually jolly and cheerful uncle. "What! are you pegging into Charity Green, if she has had the goodness to come home again?" he continued—"Never mind the old woman. Charity, my lass, I am heartily glad to see you home to us—for home henceforth you shall find it in reality—at least as long as I have a home to offer any one!"

Charity was deeply touched with the kindness of this welcome, and yet struck ominously with the concluding words. But she was saved the necessity of replying.

"Then, all I can say, father," said Midas,

who followed up, only delayed a few moments at the bottom of the stairs to have his boots dusted—"all I can say is, that if she stays in the house, I'll leave it."

"You can do just as you please, sir; I am tired of your dictation—I will be master in my own house, as long as I have one!" said the alderman, in a high and even fierce tone. "Who the deuce are you, that you should take upon you to order who shall be in my house and who shall be out? It is quite sufficient, I should think, to be annoyed with your perpetual poking, and prying, and interference in the business, without submitting to your impertinence here!"

Disputes, not unfrequently amounting to the dignity of quarrels, were of late pretty common between the father and son; but Midas had not yet heard his father speak in so decided and deeply angered a tone to him! His own lowered very perceptibly; and, true to his character, he turned his baffled insolence on Charity

Green. "It is all that mischief-maker!—she is never happy but when she has caused people to quarrel one way or another about her!—You can do as you like, sir, of course, in your own house; but Mrs. Sparkleton shall marry me directly, or I'll cut her; and then I'll have one of my own, where only people I like shall come!"

"You will never marry Mrs. Sparkleton, Midas, or you will prove yourself the meanest fellow that ever lived!" said Lady Fitzhauton. "Papa, you shall have all my money back again, if you will only get me a divorce—unless I should ever marry again!"

"Get your money back again, indeed!" repeated the alderman, with a most unwonted degree of scornful gloom—"Get your money back again!—when the fine gentleman you have married told me the other day he did not know where to lay his hands on a thousand pounds, if it would save his soul! I wanted to borrow *that*, and he hadn't it—or pretended he hadn't!"

"But he could find as much money as Mrs. Sparkleton wanted!—no, that must have been a fib—a dreadful fib—altogether!" exclaimed Lady Fitzhauton.

"It must be a lie!" thundered Midas. "Mrs. Sparkleton can't want money, for I lent her six thousand pounds the other day to buy some land, that made her estate worth at least ten thousand more!"

"She has swindled you out of it, perhaps, then, Midas, for she is capable of anything," said Lady Fitzhauton.

"Mother, why don't you speak for Mrs. Sparkleton? Why do you let your daughter be always abusing my intended? Is she everything, and I nothing to you?" exclaimed Midas, furiously.

"Never think of her again, my dear boy, for she's the horridest, the wickedest, the most dreadful woman I ever heard of; and I'd rather you married a crossing-sweeper, or a scullion—I would!" returned the mother; and she and her daughter both rushed into a simultaneous explanation of this seemingly harsh judgment of

the intended bride, which for some time rendered it an incoherent rhapsody of accusation and vengeful resolves. Enough was, however, sufficiently clear to strike both the new auditors with profound dismay; and they stared at one another in silent amazement—while Charity endeavoured, by softening, explaining, and excusing, to put things in the mildest light of which they were still capable.

The effect of the intelligence was even more remarkable on the father than on the bridegroom-elect. He turned ghastly pale, and, staggering back into a chair, exclaimed—"Then the game is up with me, too! I depended on Mrs. Sparkleton to take up some bills which fall immediately due—and I cannot obtain a single farthing in any other direction! Midas, I am afraid, if this is true, I shall be obliged to stop payment in less than three days, for she won't, of course, lend me any further assistance!"

Midas stared, as a man that beholds

the first heavings of an earthquake, and knows not whither to fly—while Mrs. Gullibull and her daughter looked at the husband and father with an expression of utter incredulity, more painful to his feelings than any ebullition of anger or surprise.

"You don't mean for to say, John! —you *can't* mean for to say, John!— that you are in any danger of turning bankrupt?" gasped Mrs. Gullibull, at last.

"My banker refuses to lend me another stiver on all the railway scrip in his possession—seventy thousand pounds—and will not lend me a bare five thousand!" returned the alderman, in agony; "and that is known all over the city. Lawless has sold me to pay his court to a man that would have lent me money but for him, and whom he keeps for his own use! And that's the reason, Betsy, why I refused the cheque this morning for the new chandeliers. You must make up your

minds to endure it all as you can—but I am a ruined man!"

"But you needn't ruin me, too, father; you might let me have a chance to save myself, at least. Perhaps I might get you out of the hobble, too!" exclaimed Midas.

"How could you do that?—I want three thousand pounds this week!" returned the father.

"Well, if I could only get her to marry me—and if you would not let out as long as you could, I think she would, now,—I would—I *might* try and raise money on her property," said Midas; "or I could get my own six thousand back, at least!"

"Pho!—she borrowed it to give me to pay for her railway shares—in most excellent lines—not those that are going down!" said the alderman, in broken tones, ashamed to own, even yet, the full measure of his defalcations.

"What a cheat she must be, then!" returned Midas, after a pause of utter

amazement. "And you, sir, too, what a —what a—what a—you are a cheat, too, father, to have encouraged her to rob me of my money! I'll bring an action against you both! I won't be robbed of my money!—or else you can give me a lien over the Baltic wheat in the warehouse, and sign a dissolution of partnership, which we'll date six months ago, if you think you really must go. It will save something from the wreck!"

"I will not, I will not; I have wronged my creditors sufficiently,—they shall have every halfpenny I have in the world—every vestige of property!" returned the old man, in a high tone. "Betsy, you and I spent our early years in poverty together, and so we must the close; but we will not disgrace ourselves by a paltry roguery, to keep a heartless fellow like this son of yours in affluence!"

"Oh, then, now I see the reason of it! It is you that have set Mrs. Sparkleton against me, by continually draining money

from her!" said Midas, in a brutally defiant tone. "But she has a good landed property left yet, and I'll spend the last farthing of it but I'll make you refund your shameful rogueries, old gentleman!"

"What! Midas, do you mean to say you will marry a woman who has tried to seduce your sister's husband?" exclaimed Lady Fitzhauton.

"I don't believe a word of it!" returned the brother. "It is all your own stupidity and invention; you are always talking against her, because you know she is partial to me, and because she is so handsome, and beats you hollow on the piano! I will believe her before any of you; and, if she denies it, I'll marry her as soon as ever I can get a licence!"

"And she has a good witness ready provided—here's Charity Green will swear on the Bible that she was to have been with Mrs. Sparkleton all the time, with some lace!" said Lady Fitzhauton, pointing, with ironical bitterness, to the young

girl, who kept herself retired as much as possible during this disastrous series of explanations; "and when you have married that first-rate lady, the witness will bring her action against you, and recover what little you have left!"

"Never!" said Charity Green, with vehemence; "your brother knows that I could not if I would."

"But can you really witness you were to have been with Mrs. Sparkleton at Madame Millefleurs, with some lace, Charity?" said Midas. "Only say that! I know I can believe you, and so will other people too,—every one will believe what you say, and know that it is all my sister's mad jealousy about the rest."

All the actors in this stormy scene turned simultaneously towards Charity Green, one imploringly, one defyingly, one scornfully, one in intense curiosity, and expectation. But with all the goodness and compassion of her nature, Charity felt that she ought not and could not utter

this falsehood. She did, however, what she could to varnish and cover Mrs. Sparkleton's indiscretion. "I know very well, at least," she said, "that they were to meet about some money matters. Madame Millefleurs declared that Lord Fitzhauton paid her bill—so he must have money; and why should he not lend it to his father-in-law? Let Lady Fitzhauton allow me to make peace between them, and get him to lend the three thousand pounds the alderman wants."

"Do you think it would be possible, Charity, there's a dear girl?" exclaimed Mrs. Gullibull, and even the almost despairing merchant raised his head, and looked at her with awakened interest and hope.

"No, it is not possible, mamma, unless he comes to me of his own accord, and on his bended knees! He will be wanting me to promise to forgive Mrs. Sparkleton, and not expose her,—which I will to the utmost. Besides, he has no money,—I

know that very well: he is always complaining of want of money; and why ought I to deprive myself and my husband of our money to keep up a grand business for Midas? Papa don't care about it—I am sure he must be tired of working now—and let Midas make a fortune for himself, as he did!"

"I am bankrupt indeed now. I did not know the meanness of my children's hearts, and how little they cared for me until now!" said the alderman, folding his arms in a mood of absolute despair.

"Oh, cousins, you ought to try and do something for him, since he has done so much for you," ejaculated Charity, no longer able to repress her feelings.

"And why don't *you* do something for him?" returned Midas, sneeringly. "I am sure you have a precious sight more reason than any of us, for you were no relation of his, and he took you in a complete beggar. I know you have the power,—for you could easily get Mr. Bagshawe to do any-

thing—at least, so I hear! And if my father had three thousand pounds, he could meet his bills, and we should all be saved."

"Do you think you could, Charity, get me this loan, in God's name?" exclaimed the alderman, starting up with the utmost vivacity of hope. "It would save me, if you could! I have hundreds of thousands of pounds locked up in railways, and if I could only get time, I could do wonders! I will pay you twenty per cent., thirty per cent., anything you like to charge, and I will always consider that I owed my preservation to the kind little orphan I took into my house, never dreaming it would one day prove the angel of it!"

"And hasn't your uncle always been as kind to you as kind can be, whatever we may have done?" sobbed Mrs. Gullibull; and rising, she threw herself with all her weight and a mighty torrent of tears, into poor Charity's arms, who had great difficulty in supporting the burden, but who

most fervently joined in the manifestation of emotion.

"But he will not lend me the money—I should not dare even to mention such a sum to him—and Mr. Bagshawe don't think anything of me now—I have refused his kind offer," said Charity, in a voice interrupted by sobs.

"Then he is the more likely to let you have it, because he will think there is a chance for him—and tell him my father will pay him seven per cent.," exclaimed Midas. Charity turned from him with speechless contempt—but her eye fell then upon the working and wo-begone visage of her uncle.

Charity had always loved her uncle, and honoured him in a high degree. He alone had been almost uniformly kind and considerate towards her; she had felt the least keenly from him the misfortune of her dependent condition. She honoured him: his enormous wealth had surrounded him to the imagination of her infancy with a species of mythic grandeur. And

now this great and kind relative was almost kneeling at her feet, imploring her to exert a power which she vaguely felt she possessed, to save him and the magnificent structure of his fortunes from ruin! Her aunt joined in, with lamentations and intreaties, in which Charity was too much affected to discern the large admixture of the ludicrous. Even Lady Fitzhauton deigned to join her eloquence. "I am quite sure, Charity, that if you don't, you will be the most ungrateful wretch that ever lived, and every one will think you so!"

What follies poor Charity Green committed in her time! We blush to record that, in spite of every conviction of her better reason—in spite of the extreme inconvenience she foresaw to herself from making any effort in such a behalf, with such a personage, she was finally so far overcome by the despair and intreaties of her relatives, that she promised to make an attempt to obtain the required redemption-money.

CHAPTER VIII.

It must be confessed that Charity had no great hopes of success in the embassy on which, duly primed with every species of promise and assurance from the alderman, she set forth on the afternoon of this memorable day. Time was of consequence, and so she consented, though with reluctance, to go on her mission in Mrs. Gullibull's carriage.

Charity had refused numerous invitations to go with Miss Dishnap to Mr. Bagshawe's house, though the former had twice consented to go to tea, and once to dinner, won by his importunities. But now she went of her own accord, unasked,

without any very exact knowledge of the locality, and in a flutter of agitation which seemed likely to deprive her of the power to perform her task very efficiently.

She arrived in the beautiful suburban villa which Bagshawe had lately taken, always "for the benefit of his health," but which he had fitted up as if he certainly did expect it should at some time be occupied by a young bride, rather than a middle-aged valetudinary. The Gullibull coachman found it at last, after wandering for some time among green lanes. In spite of her nervous trepidation, Charity was pleased with the beauty of the situation, the neatness and elegance of the little mansion—the trim luxuriance of the gardens. It was well, however, that she dared not hesitate under the eyes of the coachman and groom; else she might have wandered for a long time about the house before she would have ventured to solicit the attention of its inmates. Her voice did tremble, and

audibly, when she inquired at the gate if Mr. Bagshawe was at home; and when she heard that he was, her heart gave a violent throb.

"What name, ma'am?" asked in return the staid, respectable, elderly, widow-looking woman, who escorted her into a snug little parlour, handsomely furnished, with verandahs opening on a charming view, completely overspread with flowering honeysuckles.

"Charity Green—Miss Green, if you please." The housekeeper disappeared, with a slightly puzzled look, and Charity seated herself, quivering with expectation, at the window. We do not believe that she saw the landscape, although she gazed over it very attentively; but she listened, as if her whole soul was in her ears, to any sound of approaching footsteps. But the list slippers of the housekeeper left no echoes, and she only it was who re-entered the apartment. The worthy woman's countenance was changed in a few minutes,

and there was a very marked expression of severity and propriety in it, which did not escape Charity's notice.

"Master says he is busy reading, Miss, and can't be disturbed. He don't seem to know much of you," said the housekeeper, in a tone as dry as if she had the remainder biscuit after a voyage sticking in her throat.

"Oh, then, I'd better—go," said Charity, rising, in the utmost confusion; and the housekeeper stood with the door in her hand, as if she thought so too, when Mr. Bagshawe's voice was audible, calling down the stairs,—"I say, Elizabeth! if it's a Miss Green that wouldn't come to tea with me the other day, I know her—you can let her come up!"

"Yes, I'm the Miss Green—that wouldn't come to tea the other day," said Charity, eagerly; and the astonished matron, looking as if she thought all was not right—looking almost as if she meant to give warning the next day, on account of the impropriety—

led the way to Mr. Bagshawe's drawing-room—still snugger—still prettier!—only that Charity was in too much trepidation to observe anything but the master himself.

"Oh, so you have shaken off the old woman, and come by yourself? That's right!—Elizabeth; we don't want you!—don't be frightened, this lady might at one time have been mistress both of you and me, in an honest way—so put your virtue by for the present," was Mr. Bagshawe's greeting. "Well, Charity, what were you looking for in those fields yonder? Had you dropped a pin there in the grass last midsummer? I was watching you all the time from this window, and I saw how sorry you were when you found I was not at home!"

"Yes, I was very sorry, sir; I had business of the greatest importance,—I wanted to borrow some money of you," said Charity, with hesitation.—Bagshawe's whole face brightened up.

"How much?—a shilling?" he said,

drawing out his purse, and producing the coin; "or is that too much?—is it one of the new threepenny bits, as they call them?"

"No, sir; I come to borrow—I want to borrow—I am sent to borrow—three thousand pounds!" said Charity, herself starting at the sound of the words.

"Three thousand pounds!—well done! Make it the whole seventeen thousand at once,—but then you must take me into the bargain," replied Mr. Bagshawe, without, however, discomposing a muscle. "But, of course, that is what you mean; and I am quite ready on my part. I am sick of a bachelor life, and this house wants a mistress wonderfully!"

"Pray do not joke with me, sir—I am quite in earnest; I want three thousand pounds—to save alderman Gullibull, my poor uncle, from destruction!" said Charity, with great earnestness. "He only wants that in ready money to save all his enormous fortune! Do lend it to him!"

"Who told you so?" said Bagshawe, still quite calmly.

"He told me so himself, and I—believe him!" said Charity, bursting into tears.

"Then I don't, my good girl; if he sent you on this errand to me, it is all up with him," replied Bagshawe. "But I don't like to see you cry, neither, unless through some fault of my own,—and I should like to make you cry to prove that I could affect you in any manner! Don't cry, Charity—for I tell you the game is regularly up with old Gullibull. There is a complete panic in the share market,—it is in a fever, which in a few days will reach a crisis most likely to end in the death of the patient!"

"But he says himself, three thousand pounds will save him—and he ought to know," said Charity Green.

"I know his affairs, then, better than he does himself; for I know that neither three thousand, nor five thousand, nor even twenty thousand, can save him! It could only protract his ruin for a few weeks," replied Bagshawe; and in proof of this statement he described to Charity

the sudden and enormous fall which had taken place in the railway markets, involving what were well known to be the alderman's favourite speculations. Rumours of defalcations—of unfair dealings with stock—of false dividends, were rife, he said, which betokened the speedy bursting of the great bubble of the nineteenth century.

But Charity, faithful to her mission and her promises, continued to plead the alderman's assurances, and to urge his great prospects in the grain market, if he could only meet his immediate exigencies. Bagshawe overruled this argument, by snatching up a paper, and reading the last Mark-lane quotations, which proved a certain decline in that produce, even to Charity's unbusiness-like comprehension.

"And what have they done for you that you should be so much concerned for them?" he said at last. "Turned you out; encouraged their son to maltreat you in the most shameful manner; and now—

is there not a drop of gall in your whole composition to make 'oppression bitter,' and revenge sweet?"

He looked with so much tenderness and admiration at Charity as he spoke, that the poor girl herself half unconsciously perceived and used her power. She reminded Bagshawe of his former friendship to the Gullibull family—of all he had taught Midas to expect from him—and urged upon him the great percentage the alderman was willing to give for a sum to relieve him from his difficulties. "That only makes it the more certain he don't mean to pay;" he replied, shortly and snappishly. "But, I suppose, you think me the most mercenary old wretch possible?—And so I am, in general!—still, if I thought he could repay me, I should not hesitate a moment. But mark my words —*he never can*—it will only be a pail of water thrown into a bottomless gulph."

"Oh, yes, he will—he will pay you; I am certain of it!" responded Charity.

"Will you be his bondswoman?" said Bagshawe, suddenly. "I'll tell you what I'll do; and if you believe yourself, you can't hesitate. Promise you will marry me if old Gullibull don't pay me in six months, and I'll lend you the money."

Charity felt at once ashamed to assent, and ashamed to refuse assent, to this proposition. It would look as if she did not believe herself, on the one hand; as if she were endeavouring to lure a man who had behaved so generously and kindly to her, into a snare. On the other, to engage herself to marry as a species of forfeit, shocked all her feelings; but then, again, the events of the day—his insensibility to disgrace—had completed the ruin of Midas in her good opinion; while, on the contrary, Mr. Bagshawe never looked so little ugly—in fact, so amiable, and even attractive, as on this occasion, when the warmth of the passion which animated him had in a manner transfigured his whole appearance. The most powerful motives urged her to

consent,—and, after a brief, internal hesitation, consent she did.

"Then I hope he will never pay me, and I will set about lending it as fast as possible," said Bagshawe, quite joyfully. "Fourteen thousand pounds!—We can live very well upon that, for we shall not have a very large family. Charity!" he continued, with great animation, "I shall consider you very cheap at three thousand pounds! You cannot think how lonely I am without you; I never found myself lonely before, though I have been miserable all my life! In the first place, they made me an attorney against my will; and necessity, and then greediness, compelled me to practice my trade. Imagine what my sufferings must have been, for I had always a degree of conscience even at the height of my practice! And it gave me such a confounded ill opinion of all mankind—and womankind to boot—that until I saw you, I did not believe there was anything honest or natural left under

the sun!—Let me have you, and I wish Midas joy of his Mrs. Sparkleton!"

Charity coloured deeply; she had not mentioned a word about the recent discovery; but she was at the moment too much affected with her singular lover's generosity, to attempt dissuading him from indulging in his hopes. Moreover, she so earnestly longed to preserve her uncle from ruin, that she did not venture to put the means again in jeopardy.

"Elizabeth!" shouted Mr. Bagshawe, after a pause—"Elizabeth! bring up the tea-things: Miss Green has come to tea with me at last!"

CHAPTER IX.

It was night when Charity arrived in town again. Mr. Bagshawe imagined she was going to Putney, in the carriage; but she felt an extreme reluctance to appear there, as if to receive the thanks of her relatives, or to meet with Midas again. She therefore scribbled a hasty note, announcing her success, which she sent on to Mrs. Gullibull by the footman, while she herself made the best of her way to the bazaar.

It was almost closing time, and Miss Dishnap received her young friend with a coldness, the cause of which she could not well divine, but soon learned.

"There's a fine flourishing Frenchwoman been after you, I don't know how many times, since you went; but I don't advise you to keep such acquaintances, Miss Green! She calls herself Millefleurs, and seems to make it quite a life and death affair to see you to-night. I did not know where you had gone; but if I had known, I should not——"

As she spoke the words, Madame Millefleurs appeared bustling, in a state of great perturbation, through the stalls, until she reached the one occupied by the friends.

"Ah, I see you at last—I hold you!" she exclaimed, literally seizing Charity as if to take her prisoner. "Come with me this moment; I will not relinquish you again till you come with me!"

"Then, madam, whoever you are, I shall advise Miss Green to do no such thing," said Miss Dishnap, sternly. "What do you want with her, and who are you—at this time of night?"

"Eh quoi! you would kill *miladi—dame de la plus grande qualité!*" exclaimed Madame Millefleurs, breathlessly. "Come, Mademoiselle, or Madame Sparkleton will kill herself in an access of despair!"

"It is the lady who bought the lace, Miss Dishnap—but I had much rather not see her—what can I do?" said Charity, in great distress.

"If it is anything about business, Chary, you had certainly better not keep the lady waiting," said Miss Dishnap. "I'll go with you, and Mrs. Grocock will put the things by for us to-night."

"If she come at all, she come by herself!" exclaimed Madame Millefleurs. "If she come not, she commit the suicide of the most beautiest lady in dis world!"

"I will go, then, by myself, though I can do no good," said Charity, yielding as usual to the benevolent impulse of her temper.

"I shall mention it to Mr Bagshawe—if you do, Miss Green—for I don't like it!"

said Miss Dishnap, pettishly; for she was not pleased at the rejection of her countenance and company.

"I will explain it all to you by and by," replied Charity, in some dismay.

"Oh, non, you must not, you cannot!" returned Madame Millefleurs; and, having thus increased Miss Dishnap's suspicions, she hurried off Charity, exclaiming, "Dere is not time at all to lose everythings!"

Charity scarcely knew where she was going, until she found herself in a cab, and heard Madame Millefleurs direct the driver to the street where Mrs. Sparkleton lived. Nor could she obtain any very satisfactory information from the *modiste* for what purpose she was wanted, during their transit.

On arriving, they were immediately shown into Mrs. Sparkleton's drawing-room. Charity, who had learned to associate this lady's idea only with thoughts of triumph and gaiety, was, indeed, powerfully struck when she first beheld her on

this interview. She was lying on a sofa, vainly affecting the unconcern of reading a novel which was in her hand, by the light of a moon-shaped lamp extended by an alabaster Diana over the reading desk. But the derangement of her usually perfect *coiffure*—her swollen, red-tinged eyes—her unchanged morning costume—confessed the distracted state of her mind. Charity's mild and merciful nature was even painfully affected by the humiliation and shame visible in her once brilliant rival's whole demeanour—in the sudden fever that visited her complexion—in the almost abject caressiveness of manner with which she received herself! How changed from the Mrs. Sparkleton who ordered the lace veils in the morning!

Charity was soon, however, admitted into the secret of her own presence in this fashionable residence. Mrs. Sparkleton had heard from Madame Millefleurs the particulars of Charity's extraordinary conduct immediately before the discovery of

her interview with Lord Fitzhauton. Her anxious desire to see her—her intimations that she came to save her from impending ruin—had now acquired a weighty significance. Mrs. Sparkleton knew not how to explain this mystery, nor the circumstance of Lord Deville's presence in the house, which she also learned at the same time to be a veritable fact. In vain did Madame Millefleurs assure her that it was entirely accidental—her own conscience and observation suggested otherwise. Neither could she imagine by what means Lady Fitzhauton had effected the detection. That was obviously not accidental, since her ladyship had entered Madame Millefleurs' house with rage and inquiry on her lips.

It was equally the interest of both ladies to ascertain the facts of the discovery. Mrs. Sparkleton was almost in despair for her own reputation—Madame Millefleurs for that of her house; and the only interrogatible being among this obscure cloud

of witnesses, appeared to be Charity Green.

"Miss Green, I am exceedingly glad to see you. This is excessively kind of you! but I always saw and thought that you were of the sweetest disposition," exclaimed Mrs. Sparkleton, clasping Charity's hand in both hers, with unfashionable fervour. "You are aware—I wished to see you most particularly. You must have observed the extraordinary and ridiculous notion Lady Fitzhauton has taken into her head?—the most unfounded possible—but which really might be exaggerated into some story which would make *her* the laughter and butt of the town. Madame Millefleurs tells me—in fact you know,—you were to *have been* at *her house, at that very time*, to show me some laces? I made the appointment with you! I trust I may depend upon you—I *beg* it of you as a favour, which I can never sufficiently repay, but which I will endeavour—that you will satisfy Lady Fitzhauton

and her family on that point. I am *sure* that in case—in case—that in case of any public investigation,—for I may think it necessary to refute the scandal publicly—I can depend upon your doing me the justice—the bare justice—which I will repay by every means in my power—to satisfy all the world—that is, any one who may have a right to ask questions on the subject—of the perfect innocence and mere business nature of my interview with Lord Fitzhauton?"

A dreadful vision, of the most astute of modern lawyers "asking questions" on the subject—which he does in all such cases, with such infinite unction and point—made Mrs. Sparkleton's last words quiver, and brought a shower of tears to her eyes.

Charity was silent. She was affected, it is true, for tears also started to her eyes. But the appalling vision of a court of justice—of a false oath to be taken in its presence—a false testimony to be borne—even the possible injustice to Midas Gullibull—

rendered it an impossibility for her to assent to Mrs. Sparkleton's insinuated intreaty. And yet she felt most keenly, that compassion and generosity should have induced her to save her imploring rival, if it could have been at a less sacrifice,—at a sacrifice of anything but her own good faith and conscience. She had besides a real liking and almost tenderness for Mrs. Sparkleton, springing from the mingled goodness and tendency to admiration of the beautiful and exalted, which pervaded her character. Still she was silent.

"Why do you not answer, Miss Green? At least, don't torture one with this statuesque silence!" said Mrs. Sparkleton, vehemently. "What have they ever done for you, that you should take part with them? Nothing to what I will do, at all events! Besides, you can be *forced* to say what you know; and you know very well, you told Madame Millefleurs so—that you were to wait on me with some lace—at

the very time when Lord Fitzhauton was there, looking over my accounts."

"I am testimony," said Madame Millefleurs, with dignity.

"How else should you know I was there at all? How else could you say—how in the world did you take it into your head that to see me then, was—might be—to preserve me *from ruin!*" continued Mrs. Sparkleton, with excessive anxiety. "You will be perhaps put on your oath—you will be obliged to tell people. Lord Deville, surely—surely, Lord Deville—did not put the notion into your head?"

"No, ma'am, don't be afraid of that," said Charity, with her peculiar simplicity. "I will tell you how I knew, and why I came,—and then you will see,—that I cannot bear the testimony you require."

And Charity, very briefly, and as tenderly as possible—to spare the shame of her listener, related how she had involuntarily overheard the intreaties on one part, and the final assent on the other, to the

fatal assignation. She did not give it that name, and we doubt if she was even acquainted with the word; but Mrs. Sparkleton's fine complexion burned with shame, in her perfect conviction that even the innocent Charity construed the meeting in that light. Charity, indeed, compassionately stated, that she heard it was to investigate Madame Millefleurs' accounts; but at the same time, she said, she was so convinced of the bad intentions of Lord Fitzhauton, and that he was a man who would not hesitate to take any advantage to gratify himself, that she thought it was really a point of duty with her to follow and endeavour to prevent the interview.

"Oh, why did you not tell me all that, when I spoke to you afterwards? Why did you not put me on my guard, then, if you knew Fitzhauton to be so wicked a man?" exclaimed Mrs. Sparkleton, without venturing to raise her eyes to her lowly judge, and almost overwhelmed with shame and despair.

"I was too confused—for a long time I did not know what to do—for a long time I thought that perhaps, I had no right to interfere," replied Charity, with grave reflectiveness of look. "I thought it most probable that you would feel insulted, and deny—I could not myself believe—until I saw you enter Madame Millefleurs."

"How I grieve that ever I did," said Mrs. Sparkleton. "Believe me I had the very best intentions. I meant to remonstrate with his lordship—to come to a decisive explanation with him—for I must confess," she added, with something of reviving triumph in her expression which strangely saddened Charity, "I must confess—that he quite persecuted me with what he calls his love—his passion—and stuff of that sort. But, believe me, I never in the slightest degree encouraged him. And yet, I can't believe, dear Miss Green, that you are one of those 'stern path-of-duty' women, who sacrifice everybody and every-

thing, to do what they call 'right?' I really quite throw myself on your mercy,—and besides I will give you a hundred pounds, if you will convince people,—if you will only *say* you were to have been *there* at the same time with me."

"If I will only perjure myself? No, Mrs. Sparkleton, not for a million—not to save my own existence!" exclaimed Charity.

"Then I am utterly lost! What will the world say to Lady Fitzhauton's scandalous ravings?" said Mrs. Sparkleton, wringing her hands in despair.

"I'll tell you what you can do to save yourself—to refute whatever the world or Lady Fitzhauton can say," replied Charity, in an equable tone—"you can marry Mr. Midas Gullibull! He is willing to have you still, for he has heard the worst she can say against you, and says he does not believe a word of it, and that he will marry you, if you will marry him!"

"Then I never will,—I never *will* marry

the man that could marry me under so degrading an accusation!" exclaimed Mrs. Sparkleton, with a gleam of higher and nobler feeling, to which she was not altogether a stranger. "Miss Green, I always despised that fellow unutterably in my heart—but since he is the miserable scamp you say he is, I would rather die than marry such a wretch! I will defy everything. I will have my money out of those detestable railways, and that grasping old Gullibull's hands, at whatever loss to myself or to him!"

"Do not think of such a thing at present, madam," said Charity, much alarmed, and, singularly enough, deeply wounded with this contemptuous estimate of the man who had so greatly wronged her. "You will be sure to ruin both yourself and him! I know he can't pay the money—at least, not so much at once."

"Ruin him!—pho, nonsense!—why, the alderman is the richest merchant in

London!—it is only his inordinate greediness—he has only to sell out," said Mrs. Sparkleton. "It is absolutely necessary I should get money just now.—Look, Miss Green!—as if I were not made sufficiently uncomfortable by Lady Fitzhauton's extraordinary behaviour—just hear a letter which I found awaiting me on my return."

And Mrs. Sparkleton took one from the table, and read the following document aloud.

"Mrs. Skinflintz's compliments to the Hon. Mrs. Sparkleton, and will wait no longer. Mrs. S. has a duty that she owes to her children, and won't be humbugged no more,—has heard she deals with other houses, which is certain ruin, and therefore has no compassion, and sees no reason why she should, considering her own family is nearest and dearest to everybody, high or low, rich and poor. Besides, has heard, from particular good authority, that a certain great house is *on*

the go; and, as the Hon. Mrs. S. would take her own advice, and never listened to nobody about security in lending moneys—and so is rightly served;—for *its* paper is at a *complete discount*, and railroads are certain to go down, and to be worse than nothing for a long time. Therefore, would feel much obliged by settlement of her little account, as forwarded—now nearly three dozen times. And Mrs. Skinflintz wants the money on mortgage of Longacres—eldest son being about for to go for to be settled in life: This is to give due notice,—and unless the *other loose cash* is paid over within three days, Mrs. S. will be obliged—very much against her will—to put in force the Bill of Sale, and take out an execution against you—quite contrary to my disposition.—But it may as well be me as anybody else,—and so many bills of yours being out, there can't be a doubt on the subject. And Mrs. S. begs leave to remind the Hon. Mrs. S. that, unless *her*

promissory note is taken up this very day, it is an *act of bankruptcy;*—for, as for her to say she is a lady—not a trader, is all nonsense, even under the new law—it being quite certain that people are traders, however grand they may be, that deal in railway shares,—which would be very unpleasant for a lady to go to prison, and have her accounts overhauled by a commissioner—and most likely refused a certificate, for reckless trading; which nobody can deny who looks at Mrs. Sparkleton's books—if she keeps any. So is obliged to proceed at once.

"Yours respectfully,

"(For Abraham Skinflintz & Co.)

"SARAH SKINFLINTZ."

"What is a bill of sale, ma'am? What does it mean?" said Charity, quite bewildered with this revelation. "And do you really mean me to understand, ma'am, that you are embarrassed, too?"

"I am quite ruined, unless I get my

money back immediately from old Gullibull—so you see I must," replied Mrs. Sparkleton. "I don't exactly know what a bill of sale can do—but I believe she has one,—and every one knows what an execution is!"

"But you cannot have the money,—you must not try, or you will drive them to despair, and they will not mind what they say of you then!" said Charity, quite bewildered with this new gulph of ruin, opening beneath the tottering pile of her uncle's fortunes.

"They will not dare to say anything—since Lord Deville knows nothing—was there by accident—I can manage them finely!" said Mrs. Sparkleton, resuming much of her wonted animation of spirits. "I will let Lady Fitzhauton know that, if she says anything about me, I will tell all I know about Lord Deville and her! I know they were carrying on a most desperate flirtation together!—I have a letter that will prove it. I daresay I

might perhaps turn the tables upon them —and with perfect truth! Perhaps Lord Deville was *not* quite so accidentally at Madame Millefleurs, when her ladyship arrived, as he would have us to think! Most likely not! Don't look so petrified, Miss Green!—you don't half know what I know; and if they drive me to despair, —and I have your evidence besides, that you overheard us, and that it was a strictly business affair—a meeting strictly about an account!"

"I can witness no such thing, Mrs. Sparkleton, unless I perjure myself—unless I palter with my conscience, and affect to believe that the words only meant what they sounded," returned Charity, with indignation. "And for a lady, too, who intends, out of revenge, to bear false witness against the woman she has injured!"

"It is not false!" replied Mrs. Sparkleton, with animation; and really there was so much that was blameable in Lady

Fitzhauton's demeanour—so much that was certain in Lord Deville's character and pursuits, that she made out a very palpable case against her rival, even in the reluctant judgment of Charity Green. Mrs. Sparkleton was easily carried away by her own ideas; and once in speech, she hesitated little on what she said or revealed, to carry conviction to an auditor. Charity found, with silent but deep emotion, almost akin to horror, that Mrs. Sparkleton had never entertained much doubt of the viscount's unlawful views on his friend's wife, even while affecting to pay his court to herself.

"It was a mere trick to deceive Fitzhauton—I am convinced of it—and always suspected it," continued Mrs. Sparkleton. "So I will have my money in—I have seventy thousand pounds' worth of railway shares—and I'll give you a little fortune, Miss Green—and if anybody dares to speak a word against me, they shall not do it with impunity! I want you to tell

Lady Fitzhauton *that!*—Stupid as she is, I suppose she will not yet have let her abusive tongue loose!"

"Oh, what a noise she make in my house! I would rather set it on fire instead!" ejaculated Madame Millefleurs. But this fine fabric of hope, raised in an instant by the calenture of a warm imagination, was destined to suffer as sudden an overthrow.

Mrs. Sparkleton was yet uttering these words of self-consolation, when the voice of Miss Scurmucheon was heard on the stairs. "Oh, Mrs. Sparkleton is always at home to me—and I come on most particular business!"

"What can she want?—Madame Millefleurs, I will see you again early to-morrow about this foolish business," said Mrs. Sparkleton; "I have no doubt I shall prevail on Miss Green—what can the horrid old creature want?"

"Well, dear Mrs. Sparkleton!—I am so glad to see you still here!" exclaimed

the "horrid old creature" as she came in, and Madame Millefleurs glided out. "I really am!"

"You surprise me, Miss Scurmucheon; this is my usual residence in town," replied Mrs. Sparkleton, resuming her composure. "I have a headache, it is true—and that is why I desired to be excused from company—and why I am still in a morning dress."

"Well, then, it can't—it can't be true!" exclaimed Miss Scurmucheon, apparently much astonished.

"Very likely—if *you* have any news!—that is, there are such foolish stories told now-a-days!—They have nothing else to put in the papers," replied Mrs. Sparkleton, very calmly—and very much agitated.

"Oh, you are so severe—and it is unkind of you—for I left my tea scarcely tasted, to come off and learn all about it—for if it is true, or thought so, you know—one won't be able to see you again, perhaps for some time!" replied Miss

Scurmucheon, with an excessively prim look. "I hope, of course, it is not true, for my nephew's sake—in fact, I cannot believe it!"

"What is the matter?—Am I to be invisible, or you to go blind, Miss Scurmucheon?" said Mrs. Sparkleton. "I really can't make out what you mean."

"Both, perhaps! But I am glad, indeed, my dear, you don't understand me," replied Miss Scurmucheon, seating herself with an affectionate look. "I am so glad!—Pray, who is that young person with you? I have been so agitated ever since!—May one speak before her?"

"Certainly—it is Miss Green, Alderman Gullibull's niece!"

"Alderman Gullibull's niece!—Thank goodness, I feel so relieved!" exclaimed Miss Scurmucheon, but without at all communicating the feeling. "Mrs. Clackmannan was kind enough to bring me the paper, though she is scarcely ever able to leave her house, she is such an invalid!

It is one of the evening papers—she takes in the evening papers as well—(poor thing, she has so little to amuse her!)—as if she were a gentleman. Initials, of course—I knew it could not be you—only it is so pointed. Do look—I brought it with me. Do look: it is headed, 'Extraordinary Affair in High Life!'"

"Do you mean to—to insult me, Miss Scurmucheon!" exclaimed Mrs. Sparkleton, losing all her excited complexion. The fearful rapidity with which the press catches scent, and rattles after its prey, was not unknown to her; and with about similar emotions to those of a deer in the folds of a boa-constrictor, the conviction rushed upon her that her case had actually already got into the papers!

"Oh, no, my dear; it is not you, you know—it is only somebody else—do hear, though—and see if I was not reasonably alarmed!" replied Miss Scurmucheon, eagerly. "Here is the paper—Dear me! where is it? And I underlined it, too!—*Extraordinary Affair in High Life*——"

"Pho, pho; an old maid's charity to some orphan or another found out to be *very natural?*" interrupted Mrs. Sparkleton, desperately.

"'An affair,' Mrs. Sparkleton, 'an affair,'" read Miss Scurmucheon, no way moved to mercy by this innuendo. "'An affair likely to create a sensation in the highest circles, and to come under the cognisance of our ecclesiastical courts, is said to have met with an unlucky dénouement this afternoon. A fair widow of gay notoriety——'"

"No, it is not notoriety!—it is celebrity!" interrupted Mrs. Sparkleton, who was also most anxiously perusing.

"Yes, yes; but it makes no difference —'residing not a hundred miles from dash —street, dash—square, is said (*is said*, thank Heaven, it don't speak positively!) *is said*—to be very disagreeably implicated! The Lothario is a military nobleman more famous for his achievements in the fields of Venus than in those of Mars. It is said that the discovery has happened

very inopportunely to prevent a marriage which was on the *tapis* between the fashionable widow and a distinguished viscount. The injured wife——' "

"Miss Scurmucheon!" interrupted Mrs. Sparkleton, with passionate vehemence. "Miss Scurmucheon! if you come to my own house to insult me——"

"'The injured wife'" persisted Miss Scurmucheon, in an exalted tone. "'The injured wife!—has retired to the bosom of her family, who are, we learn, of the highest *monetary importance*, so that the services of the gentlemen of the long robe, which we hear are already engaged, are likely to receive a liberal recompence!' There now! did you ever! Did you *ever* know anything so like? Was I not justified in entertaining the most serious apprehensions?"

"I don't know—but what has all this got to do with me?" replied Mrs. Sparkleton, resolutely hindering herself from fainting away.

"Why, really, my dear, whether it is you or not, you ought to bring your action against the paper," returned Miss Scurmucheon. "I never saw such a shame;—of course there can't be any truth in it. But at least, if I were you, I really would write to the editor that it is *not* you—else every body will cut you, and—I shall be very sorry, but *I shall be obliged to do as other people do.*"

"If one brought actions against all the people who talk scandalously of one, you would be the most litigious woman living, Miss Scurmucheon!" returned Mrs. Sparkleton. "But if I bring any action at all, it shall be against you, for having the impertinence even to imagine that this paragraph in any way relates to me."

"Well, don't be angry, my dear, dear creature—I really did it entirely to put you on your guard," said Miss Scurmucheon. "I would advise you to be seen everywhere arm-in-arm with Lady Fitzhauton but I am sorry to say I positively

have ascertained she has quarrelled with her husband and gone home to her friends. I dare say it will all clear up satisfactorily. I dare say it is Lady Fitz-hauton's fault somehow or another—there is such a total want of judgment in that set. You remember what age her foolish cousin *guessed me* to be!—and indeed, the whole family, if they had not half a million of money, are little better than brutes. Do go to the Opera with her ladyship this very evening—do, pray."

"I'll see about it—yes, I think I will," said Mrs. Sparkleton, somewhat dreamily.

"Do, there's a dear creature, and don't look so gloomy. I'll go and tell every one it is not you—the brutes! I felt certain, directly I read it, it could *not* be you; and so I told Mrs. Clackmannan, but she is such an obstinate woman. I often warned my nephew (he'll do me the justice to own *that!*) he ought not to show such very pointed attentions to people in public. Not that there was any harm in them—but

for his own sake as well as yours. I suppose if the truth were known, Lady Fitzhauton *has had* some foolish fit of jealousy, and caused all this disturbance?"

"I don't know—it is very likely—I think she did do something very foolish," murmured poor Mrs. Sparkleton.

"Well, but really my dear Mrs. Sparkleton, if you will allow me as an old friend to mention it," observed Miss Scurmucheon, in a very kind and confidential tone—"people do say—I tell it you all for your own good—that you *do* lead an exceedingly vivacious life, for an unprotected woman; and the frightful multitude of visitors to your house——"

"Does not cause the frightful solitude in yours, Miss Scurmucheon!—you have no right to complain of them!" interrupted Mrs. Sparkleton, her spirit reviving with indignation and despair.

"But if you will give me authority—I know that people will be scandalous—but——" returned Miss Scurmucheon.

"How can I hope to escape, when even your perfections do not?" again interrupted Mrs. Sparkleton.

"Why, what does anybody say of me? —I defy anybody to say of me what they do of you, Mrs. Sparkleton!" replied the old maid, vehemently.

"Well, merely for your good, I'll tell you!" said Mrs. Sparkleton. "They say that you always win at cards—are a judge of cordials—that your charity is only decent swindling—and if you were not a lady, by birth at least, would have taken you to the treadmill long ago!"

"You honour me, madam!" exclaimed Miss Scurmucheon, turning very yellow.

"Not in the least, I do assure you!— I have no respect whatever for you, nor has anybody else that ever knew you!" replied Mrs. Sparkleton.

"Well, I have certainly no great desire to be an object of respect with ladies in your position, Mrs. Sparkleton!" said Miss Scurmucheon, rising. "Still, I must

say, I don't think it very good policy to quarrel with persons who might otherwise, for the sake of their own relatives, have given a certain gloss to the affair! But you are the best judge!—and, however matters turn out, I hope Lord Deville won't hear of it, or, I should fear—men are such undistinguishing brutes——"

"That Miss Scurmucheon has remained so the greater part of a century!" interrupted Mrs. Sparkleton.

"There must be a great deal in it, or you would not be so much out of temper," returned Miss Scurmucheon, fiercely. "All I hope is, that my poor nephew—I must go and see him now directly!"

"Lose no time, then—I do not desire to detain you in my house, nor ever again to see you in it!" said Mrs. Sparkleton, who had now completely lost her temper.

"I don't know that it will be very respectable to visit you in it, at any future period," replied Miss Scurmucheon; "and I must now say, that I have no

doubt this unhappy paragraph is entirely founded on fact—for people never get into such passions about lies!"

"Leave my house!" was all Mrs. Sparkleton could utter; but the words, pronounced in the highest tones of female passion, reached ears for which they were not intended—killed two birds with one stone.

"I shall *not* leave your house, as you call it!" replied another voice—also a female one—on the exterior. "I shall *not* leave your house, mum, or, perhaps, I shall not find it so easy to enter it again!"

The door flew open, and admitted the widow of the late Abraham Skinflintz and Co., with another personage who might be considered the embodiment of the vaguely grand ideal contained in that mysterious abbreviation—being a sheriff's officer.

CHAPTER X.

"MRS. SKINFLINTZ!—and you will not leave my house!—what is the meaning of this insolence?" exclaimed Mrs. Sparkleton, retreating at once in tones and attitude before this new apparition.

"Mrs. Skinflintz—and I will not leave *this* house until I have put somebody in to keep it, what's perhaps quite as able as the finest lady in the world. Mr. Girdiron, take possession in the Queen's name, and show the lady the hexecution, that she may be certain all's right," replied the money-lender. "It's for rather a sizeable sort of a debt; rather over than under weight, I should think, and I am only a acting, mum, as I told you I

should, on the Bill of Sale, though I didn't quite say when, for fear you should make a moonlight bolt of it. My poor late husband had two cases of it, and misfortunes makes one cautious."

"I don't want to give no more trouble than I can help,—don't put yourself in a fluster on my account. I like always to make myself agreeable wherever I go, and I've been in very good houses before this—ha, ha!" said the legal functionary appealed to. He was a tall, baldheaded man, with a famished, undertaker look, in a shabby-genteel suit of black, cloth boots, and with a peculiar mouth, cut down deeply on both sides, so as to express a habitude of misery, not at all contradicted by the short, self-derisive laugh with which he concluded most of his sentences.

"Dear me! what is the matter?" exclaimed Miss Scurmucheon. "You don't mean to say, people, whoever you are, that you are levying an execution *here?*"

"I do, indeed, mum; I've stood it

long enough; I gave Mrs. Sparkleton due notice. I never do *nuffin* harsh; but I can't starve my own flesh and blood to keep grand people in pomp and pride!" returned Mrs. Skinflintz. "Now, Mr. Girdiron, if you please, sir, we'll commence the hinvéntory!"

"I shan't be long about it, ma'am; so don't let my presence be any hindrance. I like always to make myself agreeable, —ha, ha!—If you've company, ma'am, I'll begin at the bed-rooms, ha, ha!"—said Mr. Girdiron, very politely, while Mrs. Sparkleton stared at the group in unuttered and unutterable consternation. "No fear of one of them nasty accommodations, here; that's the beauty of being in a lady's house, or a gent's!"

"Why, dear me, Mrs. Sparkleton!—I always understood you had a whole mint of money in railways?—Almost a hundred thousand pounds!" exclaimed Miss Scurmutcheon, turning in amazement, mingled with triumph, to that lady.

"And they are not worth a hundred

thousand snaps of my finger!" returned Mrs. Skinflintz, doing her best to express the value of the commodity by a multiplication of the sounds indicated. "I wouldn't make my fingers ache for them, if I could get them at the price!—Look at the market this morning—and look what's coming into it! All old Gullibull's, I'll be sworn, in a few hours—and there'll be a regular panic and smash-up everywhere —and shares won't be worth the paper they are printed on!"

"You don't mean that!—You must be mistaken,—the woman is surely raving!" said Miss Scurmucheon, turning yellower still. "It is only a momentary fluctuation in the market—Mr. Lawless told me so, and he is confidential agent to everybody, I do believe!"

"Mr. Lawless!—why, everybody that don't live laid up in lavender knows that he bolted this very morning, and that his name's up as a Lame Duck!" said Mrs. Skinflintz, with inexpressible scorn at this

ignorance. "Where *do* you live, mum, not to know that?"

"'Bolted!'—a 'lame duck?'" repeated Miss Scurmucheon, vacantly. "Why, he had all my money out of the three-per-cents to invest for me!—"

"Then he'll invest it for you in dancing-girls and loo, over the water, in Ameriky, if they've got any," replied Mrs. Skinflintz. "But you don't mean, mum, *acshally* for to say, that you was so grassy-green, at your age, as to trust a fellow that hadn't anything in the whole world to trade upon but his own brass?"

Mrs. Skinflintz was mistaken. Lawless had an unbounded and inexhaustible stock in trade—the credulity of mankind!

"I'll go to his office directly!—You must be mistaken!—He was recommended to me by Alderman Gullibull—and he is on terms of the greatest intimacy with Mr. Humson himself!"

"Well, and haven't you heard what's come out about Mr. Humson himself?"

returned Mrs. Skinflintz, with a tart laugh. "He may well be worth a million of money, if he buys everything, and pays for nuffin!—If you're in *his* lines, mum, I should think you are as thoroughly done as this poor lady here herself!"

"I must go and see Mr. Lawless—it is quite impossible!" said Miss Scurmucheon, bewilderedly.

"It is rather late to go and see a gentleman, Miss Scurmucheon, for a woman of your infinite propriety," said Mrs. Sparkleton, speaking for the first time since the entry of her distinguished guests—"especially a man of Mr. Lawless's character—which I have heard very lately—and I certify to you, he is a fellow not worth a straw! And believe me—notwithstanding Mrs. Skinflintz's extraordinary precipitance—I do not imagine myself in so desperate a position as you are!—In fact, I am positive that I have only to write to Alderman Gullibull—to relieve myself of the presence of these people! And as to

the alderman being in any danger—the bare idea of a man of his enormous wealth failing—is too preposterous to be entertained for a moment!"

"Two of his bills was dishonoured this afternoon!" replied Mrs. Skinflintz, whose connexions with the tribe of Israel enabled her to obtain very early intelligence on such matters.

"But a gentleman has lent him the money—I know, I saw—he will have three thousand pounds to-morrow morning!" interposed Charity Green, with energy.

"Why, if he has backers, for what *I* know, *he* may get over it," replied Mrs. Skinflintz, eyeing the speaker with infinite suspicion and doubt in the expression of her countenance. "But Lawless's game is up, and no mistake!"

"I must go and see him, late or early!" exclaimed Miss Scurmucheon. "Can any one get me a cab?—or, dear Mrs. Sparkleton, could you,—would you lend me your carriage?"

"No I couldn't, wouldn't—will not, will not!" returned dear Mrs. Sparkleton, passionately. "Go as you came, and tell what lies you please of me everywhere!"

"I have only to tell the truth of you, madam, everywhere, and—I will!" returned Miss Scurmucheon, with revengeful fury, while Mrs. Sparkleton, quite as vengefully, rung the bell for a servant to show her out.

A footman answered much more quickly than might have been expected. In fact, he was just at the door, listening—as was his duty,—to himself—for things looked very suspicious, and he was owed about two years wages, not to mention that he had found himself in bouquets and gloves for the last month. It is true he was allowed, in recompence, to neglect half his business, and plunder everything but the plate-chest, without his mistress daring to complain. The careless, impudent manner in which he now entered, showed

that he had overheard something germane to the matter.

"Show Miss Scurmucheon out!"

"Yes, ma'am—and I'll be obliged by your having the goodness to pay my flower-man this little bill—the fellow's below—and is become quite 'portunate!" said John, with dignity, and producing a dirty, greasy slip of paper from a pocket which, at other seasons, he would not have dared to seem to possess,—but still, unable quite to overcome the instinct of flunkeyism, handing it on a silver salver.

"Even my footman!" exclaimed Mrs. Sparkleton, yielding to this last anguish of degradation, and throwing herself in an hysteric passion of grief on one of her beautifully-embroidered ottomans, after dashing away both paper and salver.

"Good silver—and good weight," said Mrs. Skinflintz, deliberately raising the piece of plate, and biting one of its rich ornaments with her vice-like teeth, to

ascertain, by an assay of her own, the quality of the metal.

"Poor creature!—I must go this instant and see Lawless!" said Miss Scurmucheon, seizing her gown-tail with an air of determined resolution, and stalking out of the room. But John made no effort to attend upon the departure, or facilitate the exit even of so distinguished a visitor.

Now John, in reality, almost loved his mistress. He was proud—almost sentimentally proud—to wear the livery of so beautiful and brilliant, and high-born a lady. He held his head high among footmen, and had had two severe boxing-bouts on his mistress's account, in consequence of the arrogance of demeanour, which he thought her station authorized him to assume among the vulgar mass of his fellows. But he loved himself better still, better than all mankind and womankind to boot, as a true flunkey should; and though much disturbed, and almost affected, with his lady's display of emotion,

his own dignity was too much ruffled by the attendant circumstances to yield to any such human weakness.

"D—mn it, if I'll stand it any longer!—if I'm not even to be treated like a *christen* creature, and yet to be cheated out of my wages!—if people give themselves such airs they should at least be able to pay people their wages! So I give you notice, ma'am, I'm going to go immediately, the moment you suit yourself with another gentleman in my place; and I shall expect to be paid my wages before I quit the house."

"Go this instant!—Let me never see your impudent face again," returned Mrs. Sparkleton, and as she spoke a thundering knock nearly battered down the street-door, and restored all the footman to the soul of John, who else most decidedly intended to treat his mistress with a specimen of native and unadorned British eloquence. He vanished to answer the summons, like an unwilling spirit

compelled to obey some potent magician's evocation.

"That is either a duke or a parvenu, and I am in no condition to see either! In heaven's name, Miss Green, call out that I am not at home," ejaculated Mrs. Sparkleton, and Charity ran to the stair-head to execute the command, feeling indeed that she conscientiously could. She returned almost instantly, looking rather paler than before.

"I did not say so; it is Mr. Midas Gullibull," she observed in a slightly faltering tone.

"Midas!—Is it Midas Gullibull?" responded Mrs. Sparkleton, raising herself with a sudden expression of wonder and hope. "Mrs. Skinflintz, let me implore you to leave the room with your man for a few minutes, and I do not doubt—I do not doubt in the least—that I shall obtain the money to satisfy your immediate demand."

Mrs. Skinflintz shook her head incre-

dulously; but glancing around as if taking an inventory with her eye, to satisfy herself that nothing could be surreptitiously removed, she beckoned to Girdiron, and both withdrew.

"Miss Green, I think, I am sure, I may confide in you? You will not mention the circumstance of my momentary embarrassments to Mr. Gullibull?" said Mrs. Sparkleton; then, rising, and with a reanimated look of hope—"The family have not treated you well, I know—I *may* confide in you, may I not?—You see the desperation of my affairs—I declare, I do believe, I hear that abominable bailiff's footstep in my dressing-room—and I have made up my mind! I *must* marry Midas Gullibull—though I would almost rather die—but if I don't, I am positively ruined!"

Charity could only stare for some instants in utter bewilderment, and when she was about to give vent to some staggering words of remonstrance, Girdiron suddenly made his re-appearance.

"I've left my pencil on the sofy, I think, ma'am," said the lean long phantom coming quite close up to Mrs. Sparkleton, and suddenly stooping as if he meant to give her a kiss—at least she—the flattered beauty and belle of some seasons, shrunk back, as if she dreaded so unwelcome a profanation—he whispered, "*I an't hard!* I hate to be hard on people as is in misfortune, for I've known what it is be *misfortinate* to my own cheek, ha, ha! —and if I was you, ma'am,—I'm only giving you advice for your own good, for in course, it's no business of mine—*I wouldn't have much plate or linen!*—That's all—I shan't inquire for it, if the old woman don't!" and he glided out again on tiptoe with a significant wink, and one of his sardonic internal laughs, which meant to say to ears that could have understood, "If you like to filch anything from your creditors, I shall allow you—for a consideration!"'

"What does the man mean?—that I

should steal my own things?" said the lady in great surprise; and before the question could be answered, Mr. Midas Gullibull entered.

Let us do justice to the philosophical equanimity of temperament which enabled Midas to present himself in a costume as carefully elaborated as in his palmiest and securest hours of courtship. The scent of musk perfumed the air the moment he drew out his handkerchief—which he did the moment he entered—his hair shone with the glossiest profusion of Kalydors and bearsgrease—the redness of his whiskers was subdued with a leaden comb to a fine purple tint—his waistcoat and gloves were as white as even the Opera or House of Commons boast in their snowiest moments. He had even his customary flower of rich tints in a button-hole! He looked like a bridegroom even more than a suitor.

But he looked a great deal more astonished and confounded, than became either

character—even at the end of the honey-moon—when his glance fell, among the first objects in the room, on Charity Green. The suspicion instantly ripened to certainty in his shabby nature, that Charity had sought an interview with Mrs. Sparkleton to reveal the desperate state of his father's affairs, and perhaps his own conduct towards herself. All Mrs. Sparkleton's confusion of conscious culpability—her exaggerated cordiality of reception—Charity's cast-down eyes—were not sufficient to vanquish this idea.

"I've come to see you, Mrs. Sparkleton, to say that I don't believe anything my fool of a sister has invented against you—but there's another of them, I suppose, has been at me on the other side," began the worthy. "But if that's the case, I hope you will not believe *her* any more than I do Lady Fitzhauton! And if she says a word against my father, or tries to assail his credit in any way, it's actionable,

—and if he hasn't the spirit to bring his action——"

"I have not mentioned a word against your father, Midas, nor—against yourself," said Charity, in a low sad tone, for it really grieved her—it was not any other sentiment *now*—to see how mean humanity can be. "And as to his credit—if what he told me be true—it is quite restored: Mr. Bagshawe will lend him the money."

"Lend him the money—and by your means!—I have been most roguishly treated, Mrs. Sparkleton, by that old fellow and this woman—and I don't care if I let you know the reason, to put you on your guard against believing anything they may invent against me!" said Midas, greatly irritated with this last signal benefit—for he was satisfied the aid would be in vain, and felt it as so much taken from a hoard he ought to have possessed.

"Do not, Midas!—do not at least tell Mrs. Sparkleton!" remonstrated Charity

—infinitely more for her cousin's sake than her own.

"But I will—I always do what people I know dislike me wouldn't like me to do!—You think to keep a rod in pickle for me, and to extort money perhaps every now and then, by shaking it at me!—Before I fell in love with you, Mrs. Sparkleton, this artful girl got me entrapped into a regular promise of marriage! But she has no power to do me any harm in consequence, for I have bought her off, and have the papers back, and presents and everything of that sort, and am a free man to marry whom I like: so if you'll marry me, I'll marry you as soon as ever you like, and the sooner the better; for I want, above all things, to spite my stupid, greedy sister, and that profligate rascal, Fitzhauton, and show my father that I can do without him!"

Mrs. Sparkleton turned, almost with abhorrence, from the utterer of this passionate proposal, and with an expression of very great wonder, to Charity Green.

"Do you admit—can it really be true—that your cousin once promised you marriage—that he has broken his promise on my account?" she exclaimed.

"He has said so himself—else I should never have mentioned it; I intended the secret to have gone into the grave with myself," replied Charity, very calmly.

"You are a sublime creature, then!—the most generous woman I ever met with—the only generous woman I ever met with—that is, if you care anything at all about him, or ever did!" said Mrs. Sparkleton—almost with enthusiasm; for though not much given to the practice of the exploded christian virtues, she was not insensible to the divinity of their beauty when she encountered them.

"I still wish him to be happy—happy and prosperous," replied Charity, with a stifled sigh—the deepest, though the most suppressed, of all the many she had heaved on Midas's account. "I wish the same to you, Mrs. Sparkleton, and therefore"—she intended to have added,

"and therefore I should wish you to marry Midas Gullibull," but the words stuck in her throat, or rather in her conscience!

Charity knew, or feared with strong cause, that at this moment these two parties, whose motives to form the most intimate of human relationships were chiefly pecuniary—were both in a state of insolvency and ruin. She was convinced in her own mind of the guilty tenderness entertained for each other by Lord Fitzhauton and Mrs. Sparkleton; she knew the certainty of that actual culpability—which Midas affected to disbelieve! Oh, yes, she knew but too well that she had only to connive at their mutual ignorance of each other's true position to ensure the heaviest vengeance which the most bitter reveries of hatred could devise! She felt it—and her compassionate and tender nature arose in arms against her, like the serpents of a guilty conscience! She could not utter the words—but Midas could.

"Yes, dear, sweet Mrs. Sparkleton! we shall both be happy and prosperous all the rest of our lives, if you will marry me directly—before my sister can say anything against you to people!"

Mrs. Sparkleton did not reply—for a brief but really dreadful pause—to all expecting her answer. The man she disliked and despised perhaps more than all other men collectively, offered her, as we have said, the most tender and intimate of human relationships—and she felt that she must accept him, or prepare to encounter the horrors of shame, desertion, and poverty, in forms which her education and habits rendered the most terrible of all!

Charity looked in Mrs. Sparkleton's face with a really wild earnestness, not as in the old mournful ballad, till "her heart was like to break," but till her own seemed very like to undergo that grand, releasing snap! She earnestly hoped that Mrs. Sparkleton would pronounce a "No," which might spare her further

conflict, of a strange but rending nature, in herself. But, alas! Mrs. Sparkleton was in too desperate a condition to hesitate long.

"Well, sir, since you have the generosity—I mean, since you do me the justice, to put an entirely right construction on an affair which—in short, I am going immediately to Longacres, and if you please to follow me to-morrow with a licence, I'll—" she paused in very great confusion, but not quite of the "soft-consenting" sort.

"Won't I just!—if I pawned the shirt off my back to get it!" exclaimed the bridegroom elect, frisking about with rapture; and darting an ireful look at Charity, he added, in triumph, "You haven't done it, you see, after all, Miss Mischief-maker!"

"But I must do it!" ejaculated poor Charity, yielding to the suggestions of her conscience, after a long effort to withstand them—but she had no experience in the proper means to do it effectually.

"Unless you really are fond of each other, I am sure—I am afraid—it is almost certain—you will be so enraged with one another—you will lead a dreadful life—and perhaps do wicked things to spite each other, and go to a bad place when you die!—And it will be all my fault if I don't own—if I don't tell you, Mrs. Sparkleton,—that my uncle is very likely to turn bankrupt, and then Midas will have next to nothing—"

"You wicked creature, how can you state such a falsehood!—But I have told you, Mrs. Sparkleton, her reason," interrupted Midas. Mrs. Sparkleton looked curiously aghast.

"And if I don't tell you, Midas," continued Charity, in excessive distress, "that Mrs. Sparkleton cannot pay her debts—would be a bankrupt, too, if she were not a lady—that there is an execution in the house, and that the woman that has put it in says, that Longacres is all mortgaged to her!"

It was now Midas's turn to look thunderstruck—which he did with almost as striking an effect as ever won the acclamations of the gods in a public theatre, and certainly with a great deal more fidelity to nature than ever was witnessed on a private stage before. Charity's character for truthfulness and integrity was so powerfully impressed even upon those who most affected to doubt both, that Midas, in spite of a most resolute effort, could not bring himself to doubt the evidence of what he heard from her lips. Mrs. Sparkleton's dismayed and confused silence was in itself a sufficient attestation.

"Is it true?—can it possibly be true, Mrs. Sparkleton?" at last he gasped forth.

"A temporary—quite a temporary inconvenience, Mr. Gullibull,"—responded Mrs. Sparkleton, not very collectedly. "But I trust your motives for honouring me with the proposal you have——"

"And is there a mortgage on Longacres!—Didn't you borrow six thousand pounds of me to buy more land to it?" vociferated Midas, growing frantic with the accumulation of his wrongs.

"I borrowed six thousand pounds—but your father, sir,—your father appropriated it, I believe, to the payment of a call upon his shares and on mine—which would else have been forfeit," said Mrs. Sparkleton, exceedingly frightened with his tone and manner.

"Then you are a pair of the most consummate cheats that ever disgraced humanity, and you ought to be put in the pillory side by side!" shouted Midas—and he had good strong lungs. "You are the most infamous woman, I do believe, that ever breathed; the most heartless, unfeeling, vain, unprincipled, worthless coquette in all England, or in all the world! And I now thoroughly believe all that my sister says about you and that vile scamp of an aristocratic

swell she has married, except that I believe you are the worse of the two, and she thinks her husband is; and sooner than marry you I will marry a woman off the streets,—or this great, staring simpleton, Charity Green!"

"O, God!—that I had at least some one left in the world, with a sufficient respect for me, to kick this insolent scoundrel out of my house!" exclaimed Mrs. Sparkleton, in a paroxysm of rage and despair; and lo, as if passion possessed some spell to summon its ministers, Lord Fitzhauton entered the chamber on the words, with a look and manner already sufficiently gloomy, but quickening under the influence of the sounds which saluted his ears, as if with the forked dartings of a tempest.

"Insolent scoundrel, indeed! Does this fellow dare to offer you any affront, Mrs. Sparkleton, on my account?" exclaimed his lordship, considerably mistaking the cause of the quarrel, but not the less irritated on that account.

"In the vilest, the most unspeakable manner! — and yourself, too, Fitzhauton!—He calls you a 'base scamp,' 'an aristocratic ruffian!'" said Mrs. Sparkleton, who had lost all command over her temper, all dread of consequences, in the madness of passion.

"He shall account to me for it!—Meanwhile, fellow, leave the house!" shouted Lord Fitzhauton.

"Oh, have you turned regular bully to the establishment, my noble lord?" returned Midas, mockingly. "I suppose you did not expect to find me here; but it is not the first time, by a good many, I should imagine, that you have been here quite as late, or a little later! My sister says you don't keep very good hours at home; but I suppose you know where to spend your time pleasanter! Well, I wish you joy of the article, and I give up all my share in it without much regret. But don't imagine I'll raise a finger on her account, or fight one of your stylish military duels with you, to be shot like a crow!

I'll give you as much as you like with these ninepins," and he flourished his fists with remarkable vigour in the air,—"and she shall pay me my money, or receive company in the Bench, for the rest of her days, but—"

He was interrupted at this point by an event which, in spite of his tone of defiance, he had not probably calculated upon. He had confided in the plebeian character of the conflict he proffered, in the superiority of his plebeian strength and muscles, that he should stand no risk of being called upon to sustain those words of challenge with co-efficient deeds. But among his other manly accomplishments, Lord Fitz-hauton had carefully cultivated a knowledge of the "gaye science" of boxing—which he had found very needful in the course of some of his adventures. Personally, he was a "plucky" fellow, as was to be expected from a descendant of the old Norman blood—and that generous blood of his was now all on fire with rage

and long-suppressed passions of various kinds. Midas received a knock-down blow, which the great Tom Crib himself—he, whose strokes were held by the judicious fully equivalent to the kicks of a horse—might have envied to have given! Bendigo, famous for his magnanimous endurance of the like, would not, however, have gloried in receiving this one; but could not have surpassed the agility with which Midas arose again, his hair and forehead streaming with blood,—his brain maddened with fury,—his fists darting like cannon-balls, recalled incessantly by some mighty magician, as they hurtled forth from the deadly machine! But Fitz-hauton was a master of his science. The brutal strength and fury of Midas availed him, indeed, to inflict some bruises of no light stamp on the peer, and to beat his warding fist almost to pieces; but not to win the victory. Thrice Midas fell, overthrowing furniture, mirrors, tasteful nick-nacks of unnumbered varieties—many of

them his own and his mother's presents—and finally dashing down the admired portrait of the late Colonel Sparkleton from its proper elevation on the mantelpiece, and forcing it open, for the first time for now a pretty long seclusion.

What a sight was this for Mrs. Sparkleton!—with all her irritation and passionate wish to wreak vengeance on her insulting visitor, certainly not a pleasant one! Accordingly, during the whole violent performance (it only took a few moments, however, to enact,) she filled the air with shrieks, and rung the bell so furiously for assistance, that about the third fall, when Midas lay bleeding and almost insensible on a corner of the fender, John, the footman, deigned to make his appearance, and become a witness of the catastrophe of the scene. Charity Green had, meanwhile, silently, but assiduously, endeavoured to mollify the frenzy of the combat by interposing herself and her entreaties at every point of concussion,—alike disregarded.

"John, throw this impudent huckster out of window, and I'll give you a sovereign!" shouted the victorious peer.

"Oh, pray, let him go away, and send for a doctor!" wept Charity Green, wringing her hands.

"Do you want any more, or will you leave the house quietly, sir?" said Fitzhauton, still quivering with passion, and shaking his fists.

"I'll leave the house quietly—at present!" said Midas, rising, like the blood-boltered Banquo from his grave. "And I'll go just as I am to the nearest station house, and let them see how I am treated—and TO-MORROW," he continued, turning a deadlier white than the colourlessness of physical exhaustion—"TO-MORROW—it is too late to-night—I will go before a magistrate and procure a warrant for a brutal assault on me, when I came to remonstrate with you on your shameful behaviour to my sister, and treacherous intrigue with your paramour here; and

I'll have this man, your footman, madam, up for a witness!"

And without awaiting the effect of his words on either auditor, Midas Gullibull disappeared from the apartment, leaving all who remained overwhelmed with consternation at the threatened exposure. Nor was this all; Mrs. Clackmannan sent in a message at this moment, apparently panic-stricken, to inquire what was the matter in Mrs. Sparkleton's house, at that hour of the night!—"It really seemed as if somebody was being murdered!"

CHAPTER XI.

In fact, it was midnight! This fact was forced upon the startled conviction of Charity Green, in the first lull of the tempest, almost immediately after Midas's departure,—for a chronometer took the opportunity to strike the solitary stroke which announces that hour to ghosts who frequent well-furnished mansions—if any such there are. Choked with grief, with indignation, and pity, she was about to follow his steps out of the house—when the sound arrested her progress. She was surprised and dismayed almost equally: the thought of Miss Dishnap's alarm, and perhaps anger,—the passage through the streets at that untimely hour, struck appallingly on her imagination. More-

over, the interval suggested a new reflection: she saw Mrs. Sparkleton abandoning herself to an agony of despair and tears—and Lord Fitzhauton gazing at her in almost equal agitation, and she felt that she ought not to leave them alone, to the promptings of passion and desperation. Accordingly, she halted at the door, turned, and then walked back to Mrs. Sparkleton.

"It is very late to-night— had better not go home to Brompton, perhaps, to-night—I had better stay with you, perhaps, Mrs. Sparkleton?" said she, in a very gentle, soothing tone.

"No, leave me; let everybody leave me; let all the world forsake me!—I can die alone!" wept Mrs. Sparkleton.

"But it is so late!—I will stay for my own sake, if you will let me, and send some one to tell Miss Dishnap not to be alarmed," said Charity.

"My very footman scorns to obey me now—how can I send any one? Miss Green, I am much obliged to you, but pray don't stay with *me!*—I want to feel

utterly deserted—utterly alone—and then, perhaps, I may do something that—that people don't expect!" And Mrs. Sparkleton glanced wildly and inquiringly at Lord Fitzhauton, to mark what effect this ominous threat might have upon him.

"Miss Green can have my carriage—it is waiting at the corner of the street—I wish to speak with you a few words alone, Geraldine!" said his lordship, with much agitation.

"It is too late for me to go at all—Miss Dishnap has probably gone to-bed—I would rather stay to-night, if Mrs. Sparkleton will let me," said Charity, with some vehemence.

"Oh, yes, stay by all means!—You can help me to pack—perhaps Florine will not—I shall go to Paris the first thing in the morning!" exclaimed Mrs. Sparkleton, ashamed to persist in what was really her very anxious desire at this juncture—to get rid of the society, or rather, as she felt it, espionage, of Charity Green.

"I shall stay here then, ma'am, till you want me to help you," replied Charity, seating herself, with an air of determination.

"Well, be it so! I do not care who hears what I am going to say—you can report every word to everybody, Miss Green!" said the young peer, passionately, but without producing the least effect in removing a part of his audience which he considered superfluous. "Mrs. Sparkleton, I came to warn you of the designs of that bankrupt tallow-fellow—and to ask an explanation, which—I have no doubt—you can give me. Lady Fitzhauton has written me a letter, a model of her family impertinence; but even I doubt if she would have sent at all, but that she finds she cannot help herself, and imagines she has only to whistle to bring me back like a beaten spaniel to her feet!"

His lordship produced a letter, which he read aloud, listened to, it may be thought with considerable interest.

"Lady Fitzhauton's compliments to Lord

Fitzhauton, and wants to know what he really intends to do—whether it is his intention to make himself and the *vile woman* infamous in the eyes of every one? Or whether he will come home again and be reconciled, in case she should make up her mind to forgive him? Lady Fitzhauton might be induced to do so, her catechism teaching her to do as we would be done unto, if his lordship would promise most solemnly, on the Bible, to confess all that Mrs. Sparkleton has ever done to him, and how she coaxed him to go to that wicked Frenchwoman's house to meet him? Lady Fitzhauton is quite convinced that it was chiefly the *vile woman's* fault, and that she must have almost forced him to come—and she knows it, both by what she *has seen herself*, and what she has heard from *other* people, of Mrs. Sparkleton's shameful behaviour to his lordship.—Viscount Deville has often told her of things himself, and Lady Fitzhauton has now in her possession the very *blotting*

paper his lordship found on the wicked creature's desk, which is almost a copy of her note; and though it is smudged, and scarcely readable in many places, there is quite enough remaining to satisfy the Lord Chancellor, or Lord Brougham, or anybody, how her husband was entrapped into a regular snare, under pretence of looking over an account, which he had no business whatever with—much less to pay *with Lady Fitzhauton's money,* as it must have been. And Lady Fitzhauton wonders how his lordship could have done so, if *he had known all,* and how much worse *she* might have served *him!* To show what kind of a person Mrs. Sparkleton is, and whether *everybody* prefers her to Lady Fitzhauton or not, Lady F. is now firmly convinced that the *wicked creature* knew very well all along that Viscount Deville was not at all after her, but was courting Lady Fitzhauton—which he was, as much as ever a man possibly could—and Mrs. Sparkleton has a letter

which proves it, if she would only show it. All this is to be in *strict confidence;* but Mrs. Sparkleton has a letter Lord Deville wrote to Lady Fitzhauton, which shows very clearly who he was *really* after, and how Lady Fitzhauton might have run away with him, if she had chosen, she has no doubt. He was only making fun of Mrs. Sparkleton, and Mrs. Sparkleton knows it; but he was desperately in love with Lady Fitzhauton, and even if he was asked, would most likely not deny it.

"However, to make peace, and out of Christian goodness, Lady Fitzhauton is willing to come to terms, if his lordship will come home to Fitzhauton House, and promise, upon his word and honour, *never* to speak to Mrs. Sparkleton again, and never to go where she is, or sit in her company again as long as he lives, and to lend Papa four or five thousand pounds to pay for some corn next month. And Lady Fitzhauton will agree to forgive

Mrs. Sparkleton, and not to expose her, as she intended, if she will *immediately* marry her brother, Mr. Midas, and promise never to come anywhere where Lady Fitzhauton is, and never to speak to Lord Fitzhauton again, or look at him even; or else she will consider the arrangement broken, and tell every one of her shocking behaviour.

"Lord Fitzhauton must reply directly, or proceedings will commence for a divorce the moment Papa can spare the money."

"Well, Mrs. Sparkleton?" said the said lord, at the conclusion of this judicious overture of reconciliation.

"Well, Lord Fitzhauton?" replied Mrs. Sparkleton.

"*Is* there a letter of the kind? Did you really know that Lord Deville was courting her ladyship (as she calls it) and help to betray me?" exclaimed Fitzhauton, fiercely.

It may be thought that Mrs. Sparkle-

ton was not very likely to answer such a question in the affirmative, at any time. But now she was irritated to the highest possible pitch against her accuser; enraged at the thought of being represented in a light at once so secondary and so base; exasperated with the triumph afforded to Lady Fitzhauton's vanity; afraid of its effects on one so easily led away by dazzle and effect as Lord Fitzhauton; irritated to excess with the prospect of his abandonment, held out as the condition of reconciliation, after she had lost—she had too much reason to fear—her position in society, on his account. Besides, the desperation of her pecuniary affairs—love, jealousy, and revenge—spoke so powerfully to the contrary, that we really should have thought it infinitely more surprising if Mrs. Sparkleton had answered with the truth, than with a denial of that generally inconvenient goddess's statements. And then it was *not* the truth, this flagrant

and positive accusation of conspiracy and complicity against Mrs. Sparkleton! We have very clearly seen that all the time she had never once formed a clear intention or idea on the subject, or even on that of her own conduct or purposes! We declare our belief that she would have been as much startled, at any stage of the affair but the last, as anybody, to have perceived to what kind of catastrophe it was tending.

"Did I really know that Lord Deville was 'courting' your wife, sir? Did I really aid him in that notable project?—And is there a letter from him to her ladyship, in my possession, which proves the same?" she said, with an astonishment which no actress could have surpassed. "I leave you to judge yourself, sir; contenting myself with informing you—as I think I formerly did—that there is no foundation for Lady Fitzhauton's insinuation, other than her own absurd vanity and absurd attempts to

force Lord Deville into a flirtation with her, because she thought it fashionable to have a cortejo, or cavaliere servente, I suppose, as they have in Spain and Italy! —As to my *aiding* him!—I think, most people will admit I was not very likely to do so! and in fact I assure you that at this moment I believe Lord Deville would give his right hand for mine—and under the circumstances I shall perhaps be compelled to prove so, by accepting it! Lady Fitzhauton surely wants to get rid of you by an easier process than a false accusation—she wants to urge you into a duel with Lord Deville! And as to any letter in my possession—the only one I know anything about, from his lordship to Lady Fitzhauton, is an invitation to a Strawberry Feast, or something of that sort, which was so elegantly written that I inclosed it, as a model of good taste, to a friend in Paris—where you may see it if you should happen to go there this summer."

"I shall go there, doubtless, if you go, Mrs. Sparkleton!—I pledge my soul to that!—And promise me you will go to Paris, and that you will not stay and marry that pragmatical old coxcomb, with his Strawberry Feasts!" exclaimed Lord Fitzhauton, with vehemence.

"Well, I am not excessively inclined to do so—at least, not at present—for I know he tried to annoy me by affecting to pay some attentions to Lady Fitzhauton," said Mrs. Sparkleton, and yet seeming to hesitate, as if any choice remained to her.

"Did he, indeed?" repeated Lord Fitzhauton, with a vivacity which excited Mrs. Sparkleton's alarm still more vividly, on another score. "Then, by Heaven, I will have his real motives and purposes more clearly ascertained! I am supposed, I imagine, to have wronged *him* in this recent affair; but if he don't challenge me, I shall conclude he has wronged me, and challenge him!"

"My dear Fitzhauton, how can you

talk so !—You would utterly ruin me with society!" exclaimed the lady. "I repeat again—I am going to Paris to-morrow—where I have no doubt Lord Deville will follow me, while you—at the price of a few submissions and humiliations, no doubt, your wife will be graciously pleased to receive you home again, and restore you to your usual allowances and perquisites in her household!"

"If you will promise to go to Paris to-morrow, and not to let Deville follow you, I will leave her for ever—money, and mother, and all!" returned the young nobleman, with a side, but most emphatic glance at Charity Green, as much as to say, "If she were not here, I would say, that henceforth, on those terms, I dedicate the remainder of my life to you—and you alone!"

"But what security have I of *that?*—I confess I should not like to be without a friend whom I liked, in the whole world—though one can do as well without

things of the sort in Paris, as anywhere in the world!" replied Mrs. Sparkleton, with an answering glance, which seemed to say, "Never mind her; she is too simple to understand anything but in the plainest words." And, indeed, Charity listened to this conversation with a very remarkable expression of bewildered doubt.

"I will attend you to Paris in person, dearest Geraldine!—I will not leave you another moment all the days of my existence, if you will suffer me to devote it to your service!" replied the peer.

"Oh, no, no, no!—I cannot live without people's names in my visiting books—Such a step would quite compromise me with society," said Mrs. Sparkleton, with horror. "I shall go alone, of course—but of course I cannot hinder anybody from going to Paris, also, that chooses. The necessity of my affairs compels me; I must go while they sell off my railway shares. At present I could no more pay what I owe than the National Debt! That will

be sure to come out in time, and will account for my absence—while my return will satisfy everybody that I have plenty of money again!"

"I shall be proud to be your banker meanwhile, Mrs. Sparkleton!—But as to the absurd sum Lady Fitzhauton wants me to give her father, I could not get it if I were to sell myself!" said Fitzhauton.

"*Again?*" observed Mrs. Sparkleton, with bitterly satirical emphasis. "And now it is all arranged; I pledge myself to my part of the conditions,—and you, my lord—"

"Will give none—need give none, but your own charms, dearest Geraldine! and the passionate love I shall cherish for you to the latest moment of my life!" returned his lordship, with warmth, and snatching Mrs. Sparkleton's hand to his lips. A momentary vision crossed the lady's mind, of an accidental meeting she had once witnessed between Lord Deville and Mrs.

Captain Fauxpas, in Paris, sometime after they had become alienated. But the lighthouses of experience are erected in vain for humanity—tossed and driven on its seas of passion; and she said, with a smile, which seemed like returning sunshine to a stormy sky, "I shall expect you, then—but to-night, good night!—Miss Green has promised to assist me; and we ought to set to work at once—for, perhaps, I might even be personally detained. *When* may one expect you in Paris?"

"To-morrow evening!"

"Not *quite* so soon, if you please! Give me at least two days' start in the Morning Post!"

"Very well. It is an immense time; but I ought not to leave town, either, until I hear what sort of humour Deville is in; for Lady Fitzhautou will be sure to tell him everything!—Good night, then, dearest Geraldine!—This shall be our last parting, my own at last!—Miss Green,

you will help Mrs. Sparkleton to pack, no doubt; and your cousin will be much obliged to you of course for facilitating her departure."

"Oh, don't, sir—don't, ma'am—agree on such a wicked thing!—Remember, it is forbidden in the Ten Commandments!—You might be drowned on the way, or killed on a railroad—don't venture on such wickedness!" ejaculated Charity Green, actually clasping her hands in the energy of intreaty.

Both parties stood astounded at the indecency of the allusion—amazed at the impropriety of the expression!

Lord Fitzhauton recovered the first.

"Yes, I ought to go with you, dearest Mrs. Sparkleton, to watch over your safety and comfort! But where are Miss Green's senses gone wool-gathering?"

"It is the most absurd supposition possible—I could prove my entire innocence to any person of common sense," said Mrs. Sparkleton, albeit confusedly. "Pray,

my lord, have you not the identical note which Lord Deville's ridiculous jealousy, and the garbled paper he found, has so strangely perverted?"

"I have it here," replied Fitzhauton, producing the required document.

"You may read it, Miss Green; you see it has the post-mark and everything quite correct," continued Mrs. Sparkleton. "I intend to send a copy by you to Lady Fitzhauton, and you can certify that it is a true one."

"I will—I will do *anything*—if you will only promise not to go, on this arrangement, to Paris," exclaimed Charity. "Oh, Mrs. Sparkleton, *do* stay, *do* stay, and marry Lord Deville, if you can."

"Geraldine, I rely upon your promise; I am determined Deville never shall possess you, if I die for it!" said Fitzhauton, with angry vehemence.

"You may rely upon my promise, and claim it in Paris as soon as you like, after to-morrow," said Mrs. Sparkleton.

"Good night, then, dearest."

"Good night then, my dear, dear Fitzhauton."

And Mrs. Sparkleton accompanied his lordship to the door—to the head of the stairs, where they communed yet awhile; and the dismayed Charity distinctly saw them embrace as they parted!

Mrs. Sparkleton, in fact, returned with the look of a woman who has made up her mind to brave everything. She was no longer tearful, undecided, submissive. And yet she was moved and troubled with the expression of intense sorrow and intreaty in Charity's face as she returned. "You are the best of creatures, my good girl," she said, after a moment's thought; "but you are frightened without cause. Besides, what can I do? I am actually at this moment a positive beggar. They have seized all my valuables—perhaps they will soon seize myself. And unless I get a pan of charcoal, and shut myself up with it, à la Parisienne, I must—go abroad."

"Why not marry Lord Deville, madam? He thoroughly deserves you!"

said poor Charity, with that simplicity of expression which characterised her.

"Because, my good girl, though I concealed it to prevent a duel, or something of that sort, I do really think—you know, Lord Deville is quite a rake of an old fellow—I think he *must* have had designs on Lady Fitzhauton. I'll show you a letter of his—*the* letter—and would you have me marry a man of that sort? Besides, after this recent affair, perhaps he really would not have me, myself—though it was Lady Fitzhauton he made his butt of, and not me. It stands to reason!—she is married; what could he want with her?"

And not troubling greatly to preserve consistency with her former statements, or perhaps more anxious to convince the remonstrator of the necessity of her procedure, Mrs. Sparkleton produced the famous Strawberry note, from a private escritoire. This she read aloud, with great emphasis on the more salient points; and concluded with the very rational inference,

"Now, don't you see, by the things she says against me, and the efforts he makes to set people against me—that is, Lady Fitzhauton—he *could* have meant no good either to her or to me?"

"God forgive him!" sighed Charity.

"But I shall not—in a hurry! He has done me incalculable mischief!—you may prevent him from doing a good deal more," continued Mrs. Sparkleton. "It is the story of the judgment of Solomon again! Lady Fitzhauton wants to get her husband into a duel—she would not mind if he were killed, so that she might get into the papers—but I cannot bear the idea of the least danger being incurred by him! Believe me, Miss Green, that is why I want him to come to Paris! But I cannot always be watching over them! What I intreat of you to do, as a last immeasurable goodness, accordingly, is to let Lord Deville see a complete copy of my note to Fitzhauton, that he may have a reasonable pretext to think himself not

so ill-treated as to require satisfaction. Men are such fools, you know!—and for you to tell him, from me, that if he *dares* to utter a word against me, or to abet Lady Fitzhauton in her false accusations, or to challenge Lord Fitzhauton, or do anything of that sort, which may compromise me, and countenance ridiculous reports, I will show this letter to Fitzhauton, and have it published in all the papers; and then he will be scouted by all the world, for the most hypocritical, designing, wicked old fellow in it!"

Charity Green listened; and an extraordinary thought came into her head as she listened—extraordinary for her, at least, to conceive—it was so complex, bold, and decisive—a real *coup de maitre!*

"I will show a copy of this note, not only to Lord Deville, but to Lady Fitzhauton and her family; and I will tell his lordship about the letter—and I will help you to pack up at once—if you will promise to me not to let Lord Fitzhauton

know where you reside in Paris—not to write to him, till you receive a letter from me!" she said, with sudden energy.

"Agreed!" replied Mrs. Sparkleton, rather dubiously, and very much as if she only promised to soothe the applicant. "But —I am sure I do not know how or where to begin packing;—where is Florine?—Florine has surely not had the impudence to go to bed without my leave?"

But Florine had gone to bed without leave! She enjoyed the confidence of John the footman, and saw no reason, from his report, to deprive herself of her natural rest, for a mistress who was so likely very soon to cease to be so. Mrs. Sparkleton was so exasperated, that she went and roused the sleeper herself, and with such manifestations of anger that, if Florine had not been seduced by the magic words—"I am going to *Paris* immediately!" she might perhaps have encountered a feminine edition of John the footman's impertinence. As it was, she

attracted the notice of the vigilant Girdiron, who had been graciously pleased to take up his quarters for the night in the best bedroom of the house, except Mrs. Sparkleton's—who had not the old superstition of reserving the *very* best for any guest whatever.

This worthy dressed himself with all convenient speed, descended—and a tap from his lean long knuckles at Mrs. Sparkleton's door startled that lady, her maid, and Charity Green, in the midst of a most interesting discussion, as to the particular trunk in which they should stow a favourite and latest court dress—the one in which she meant to pay her respects—to whoever or whatever might be in possession of the Tuilleries, immediately on arriving.

"Can't have nothing removed from the house, ma'am, by night—tain't suffered; ha, ha!" said Mr. Girdiron, through the key-hole, in his derisive, funereal tones.

Charity, however, poor girl, had seen a

sheriff's officer in former times, and had some idea of the extent of his powers.

"You cannot hinder a lady from taking her own clothes, sir," she said—very meekly.

"And, besides, don't—and here is half a sovereign for you!" said Mrs. Sparkleton, handing out the money—and Mr. Girdiron, remarking, "I an't allowed to take money," took it, nevertheless, and added—after a moment's internal struggle—"Well, as you are such a real lady, ma'am, I don't mind if I tell—I should advise you, if I was you, to make quick work of it—for Mrs. Skinflintz told me, if I had any suspicion of your intending to bolt, to send her word, and she 'd get something what 'ud hinder you!"

This hint was not without its effect, and a very strong one, on Mrs. Sparkleton—too strong, indeed. She spoke the truth when she said that she felt herself as "nerveless as a sack," and sank on a sofa very much in the style of such an article,

suffered to fall in collapse. But Charity supplied her place most amply; and, very shortly after daybreak—quite in time for the first Dover train—she had everything in readiness for a departure. Mrs. Sparkleton then consented to go, provided Charity would accompany her to the station, and see that her luggage was properly stowed; for she was quite incapable, she declared, of looking to anything of the sort herself; and Florine was "quite a fool in everything but dressing one!"

She took care, however, before she went, to send a note of her departure to a fashionable morning journal, which she antedated by a day; and confiding a copy of her former fatal epistle to Lord Fitzhauton, and a thousand times exacting from Charity Green a renewal of the promise to convey her resolution on the subject of the Strawberry note to Lord Deville, she at last consented to set forth on her flight. Three loaded cabs with difficulty conveyed "a few absolute necessaries," for

the lady and her maid, themselves occupying a fourth with Charity Green.

It was so early in the morning that Mrs. Sparkleton had reason to hope she could have proceeded on her journey, without exciting any observation, which she greatly dreaded. In fact, the chill of early day was still very perceptible; and the sun had hardly attained any power. Nevertheless, she was surprised, and soon a little dismayed, to observe how many persons seemed afoot—and persons, too, of fashion, and apparent respectability of various kinds—in the commonly accepted sense of that word, meaning those who are well-dressed, and seem to have money in their pockets. By the time they reached London Bridge, the number of people traversing the streets, seemingly intent on some great object, and all proceeding in the same direction, stirred the anxious wonder of Charity Green also. A continuous stream of people, now darkened with the masses of a vast and

haggard populace, flowed past in never-ceasing current, strengthened by new accessions at every corner and turning of the streets.

"Is it so every morning, Miss Green? —Is this about the time when people go into the city to do all the work there?" Mrs. Sparkleton had inquired several times—receiving only a perplexed and doubtful answer from the inexperienced oracle appealed to—when the mystery was suddenly explained.

"I say, Bill, do you think them cabs has lots of the nobs in them a-going to see her turned off?" said a dustman, who, all begrimed with ashes, and smoking a short pipe, was stalking hastily along beside a costermonger with a ginger-beer truck.

"I shouldn't think so, because why? them as could afford to ride has been there all night, in their proper places, a-taking it easy in the windows opposite, wot has been fitted up as good as a

theatre, for to see them swing!" replied the itinerant restaurateur.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Sparkleton, with a slight shudder; "now, I remember—poor Mrs. Redgold is to be hung to-day, and her husband with her! Don't you remember, Miss Green; haven't you heard? They murdered some sort of an exciseman, or customhouse-officer for — for his Railway Scrip!"

And "poor Mrs. Redgold" was hanged on that day—in black satin, with a handsome black lace veil on her head, which concealed the blacker agonies of her doom from the opera-glasses of the distinguished audience posted in the *boxes* before that grand dramatic *spectacle*, which a liberal and enterprising manager, Justice, offers every now and then to the public amusement. But Mrs. Sparkleton was half-way at Dover, starting—will it be believed?—in a parliamentary train, before the illustrious gold-worshipper in ques-

tion met her doom, in company with the fatuous villain, her spouse.

Mrs. Redgold had only carried out the great principle of the sect to which she belonged, to an excess disapproved by society. She had offered a living sacrifice to the Modern Moloch—which is not considered right! We may sacrifice—nay, we are expressly enjoined by the doctrines of the religion, to sacrifice our own and our children's hearts and affections, all the nobler aims and objects of existence, to the supremacy of the deified Fiend in question. But we must not precisely kill a man! Mrs. Redgold did. She invited a friend to a dinner—for which she made no other preparation than a grave and a loaded pistol; and after having debased herself for years to a priest of the infernal Deity she worshipped—old, ugly, mean-spirited, and avaricious—she finally sacrificed herself on an altar contrived for the purpose, in the kitchen of a lowly abode; but destined thenceforth to become the shrine of many an exalted pilgrimage!

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER seeing Mrs. Sparkleton fairly *en route*, and having received, as a parting cajolery, the name of the hotel to which she meant to go, information of which she was to enjoy the exclusive possession for a day or two, Charity Green set out, weary, sad, and pale with exhaustion of body and mind, to walk to Brompton. Her object was to assure Miss Dishnap of her safety, about which she feared her friend would be very uneasy, to refresh herself with a little rest and tea, and then to make the best of her way to Lord Deville's, on the singular commission with which she was charged, and on another of her

own, which would excite the reader's misgivings as much as Charity's herself, if we thought it advisable to put him in any trepidation by the disclosure until we are obliged.

Charity arrived at Miss Dishnap's little mansion of cleanliness and order about six o'clock on a fine summer morning. This was her usual hour to rise, or even earlier; and indeed, as Miss Dishnap had not gone to bed that night, it was not very surprising that the door was opened with singular promptitude to Charity's well-known, timid rap. But it was a little surprising, perhaps, that immediately Miss Dishnap, who opened the door, had recognised the visitor, with her fagged, spent, wo-begone countenance, she banged it to again, in her face!

Alas, poor Charity, thou didst not expect this kind of reception! Thou didst not know how haggard thou wert looking, how little Miss Dishnap could account for thy unaccountable absence all night;

thou didst not take into consideration what an ill opinion she had formed of the lady who took thee in a cab from the bazaar the night before; how she had spent the whole interval in anxiety of the acutest kind, blaming herself and thee; how, finally, she had come to the conclusion that thou wert weary of thy poverty and misery, and had wilfully suffered thyself to be inveigled into some den of infamy; whence thou hast dared to present thyself in her pure and, truth to say, very old-maidish presence! Charity only remembered all this when the door was closed in her face.

Nevertheless she ventured, after an interval, to rap again—without producing any effect. Her natural timidity and nervousness of character then began to exercise their sway over her. She began to get frightened lest she should be observed by the neighbours, lest curiosity and speculation should be aroused; and in great consternation walked away at

the very moment when Miss Dishnap, ashamed of her ebullition of temper, and struck with the thought that she might be mistaken, had made up her mind to open the door and admit her—if she only rapped again!

Three hours more of painful and sorrowful wandering in the streets, a cup of cocoa at a moveable shop which disposed of the beverage hissing hot to passengers, were poor preparatives to the interview Charity was yet determined to seek with Lord Deville. She had only a penny in her pocket, and was therefore obliged to content herself with this humble and not very inviting refreshment.

At ten o'clock, Charity thought she might present herself to the notice of his lordship without fear of being inconveniently early; and then she discovered that she had forgotten to ascertain his direction from Mrs. Sparkleton. Nevertheless she had some indistinct idea of his place of residence, and imagined, not

without reason, that a personage of so much importance would be easily discovered in his neighbourhood. And, indeed, she was not long in ascertaining Lord Deville's abode—at which she presented herself with a heart too weary to throb any longer, even if she had not lost so much of her old superstition towards rank and title.

The servant who admitted Charity Green into Lord Deville's stately mansion stared with astonishment at her when she requested permission to see the noble master of the house. He thought that, at most, she had come to pay her respects to one of the housekeeper's underlings. But he was a man of great experience, both in the world and in his master's habits, and he replied with urbanity that his lordship had only just gone to bed,—was only just returned from Horsemonger Lane, and consequently—unless her business was very pressing—he should not like to disturb him.

"From Horsemonger Lane!" thought Charity Green, but—"Oh, yes, it *is* exceedingly pressing," she said. "I come from a lady—a lady—a lady who—"

"If there is a lady in the case, I will deliver any message," said the urbane lackey; a great contrast to the proud porter of Madame Millefleur's establishment.

"You need only say—if he will get up for a minute—it is of the utmost importance I should see him directly."

The lackey gave a courteous, pleasing, inexplicable smile—and disappeared. He returned in a few moments with word that if she had a note she might give it to him to deliver; if a message, she might ascend with it in person.

Charity Green, in the eagerness of her ideas, overlooked some obvious considerations which ought to have occurred to her; and it was not until she found herself ushered into his lordship's chamber, where he lay in bed, with only his head

visible from the sheets, cased in a pretty scarlet silk nightcap, that she imagined in the least that her reception was to be in the precise style of an ancient royal levee! Ere she could express her surprise, or perhaps some other sentiment, the discreet lackey had vanished, closing the door after him,—and his lordship, taking a rather sleepy but curious stare at her from the pillow, observed:—"Well, my dear, whom is the pretty little message from? But really I don't think she was very wise to send so pretty a messenger."

This was said very kindly and complimentarily. It showed his lordship's command over his temper to admiration, for, after all, he had not been so much amused with the spectacle in Horsemonger Lane as he had expected. The woman kept her head too carefully covered up: the man merely looked deadly white and foolish, and quivered in the joints. And then, after all, it gave his lordship a sensation he neither desired nor ex-

pected—though he had bargained for a strong one—when those two miserable figures were swung off like carrion crows in the air. He did not like to see a lady hanged—and really Mrs. Redgold looked quite ladylike in her black satin gown and lace *coiffure!* His lordship had only expected to see a *woman* hanged. He was tired, too, with sitting up all night, in a miserable little dungeon of a room, to see the thing at all; and his head ached with the champagne he had been obliged to drink to keep his spirits up to the proper pitch for enjoying that sort of thing.

"My name is Charity Green, my lord; I thought your lordship was up! Alderman Gullibull's niece, my lord!" replied Charity, in consternation, moving to the door.

"So I am *up*—I can't say particularly wide-awake!—I mean I can hardly believe in my own eyes!—the quiet, demure, orderly young creature I seem to re-

member by that name," said his lordship, staring with wider eyes than ever, "and actually it is you!"

"I want to speak to your lordship—I have a message from Mrs. Sparkleton," said Charity, putting her hand on the door-latch.

"From Mrs. Sparkleton? Well, my lordship is here—don't run away; I protest to you I won't eat you," said his lordship, rising in considerable agitation on his elbow. "Pray, don't run away, Miss Green!—Don't be alarmed, though I own the quilt is a little fanciful, covered as it is with a dancing *corps de ballet.* It is a Parisian taste, not mine!—or stay, as you really look quite frightened of me, I will put on my dressing-gown, and do myself the honour—Royston! (and he rang his bell very briskly), show Miss Green into the breakfast-parlour, where I will join her immediately."

In a few moments the viscount had dressed himself in the morning costume

indicated, and though he was rather hurried and anxious, not without some attention to effect. He even put on a new pair of embroidered slippers for the occasion. He was a little flurried and astonished certainly on first recognising Charity Green, but he had now thoroughly resumed the *rôle* which he considered his right in the recent discovery—that of an injured man.

"Well, Miss Green," he said, as he entered, "you will excuse my foolish valet—a fellow who has been in some very bad services, I should think, to make so great a mistake as to—but I own I am myself astonished to see a young lady of so much admirable decorum of manner keeping up any species of connexion with a woman, who like Mrs. Sparkleton—but you are perfectly acquainted with the afflicting particulars."

"But you are not, sir, perhaps," said Charity, with a little hesitation. "Mrs. Sparkleton has desired me to present you

with this copy—which I can witness is an exact one—of the original note to Lord Fitzhauton—which caused all the mischief, by your finding a piece of blotting-paper that had taken an impression only of what inculpated Mrs. Sparkleton!"

"Good heavens! how do you know that?" exclaimed his lordship, mechanically taking the offered writing.

"Lady Fitzhauton has written to her husband, to tell him how you made love to her; how you made addresses to Mrs. Sparkleton your cover; and how you induced her to go to Madame Millefleurs," replied Charity.

"Foolish, inexpressibly foolish, vain, heartless doll of a woman! You don't really mean to say that she has done so prodigious an act of selfish senselessness?" exclaimed the viscount, starting up and traversing the room with agitated strides.

"I heard Lord Fitzhauton read the exact words to Mrs. Sparkleton, and demand of her your letter, which her

ladyship declared offered full confirmation to her words!" replied Charity. She had an excellent memory, and she repeated almost *verbatim* the entire contents of Lady Fitzhauton's communication to her spouse.

"Unparalleled folly! prodigy of silliness and vanity!" exclaimed the viscount, who perceived very clearly that the repetition owed nothing to invention; "and people who know only what they hear about the circumstances will be sure to consider me a prodigy of duplicity and—and—I don't know what, but something very horrible, of course!"

"They will indeed!" exclaimed Charity, with great earnestness. "They will consider you a wonderfully bad man—especially after what you did once before!"

"I shall be scouted out of all society," muttered the viscount; "there cannot be a doubt of it: Mrs. Sparkleton, of course, produced my foolish letter, and I may expect a message from Lord Fitzhauton in the course of the morning?"

"No, Mrs. Sparkleton did not; she has taken it with her to Paris," replied Charity Green.

"To Paris!—has Mrs. Sparkleton gone to Paris?—but are you sure she did not show the letter?"

"She denied having it—but as Lord Fitzhauton intends to follow her there immediately, she will be sure, out of revenge, to let him see it at last!"

"Intends to follow Mrs. Sparkleton to Paris?" repeated the viscount with astonishment. "Well!—that might do very well—it will confirm everything!—But yet it really is a pity so fine a woman should sacrifice herself to such a strutting jackanapes as that!"

"But he don't mean to go unless you challenge him!—For he says, if you don't he shall be convinced that he is the injured party, and shall challenge you!"

"Amazing!—most extraordinary logic indeed!" exclaimed Lord Deville. "Anyway, it seems, we are to have an *exposé*

and a meeting, and he makes certain of killing me!—and it is not at all unlikely; he is a first-rate shot!"

"Or else you must kill him, in an unjust quarrel, and be a murderer!" said Charity, with strange solemnity, for one who generally spoke with as little emphasis as possible, to avoid attracting notice.

"What odd, startling, unpleasant words you use, Miss Green!" exclaimed the viscount, quite out of temper, and very considerably agitated. "I don't want to kill the man; but any way, my character, which has cost me such a world of trouble to repair, is irretrievably ruined! But I certainly shall not set myself up as a mark for any man's bullets, without making an effort in self-defence. I am not so much troubled at that, as that I am almost certain—being in the power of a woman mortally offended—my character will be given up to the ill-natured observations of the

world. Indeed, I shall be rather pleased if I can give it Fitzhauton a little, as I did the other fellow, if it were only to punish that blonde little fool of a wife of his, who sacrifices everybody without the least scruple, to her intolerably selfish vanity. And I own I shall like to do something that may prevent his journey to Paris, for I had no idea, until lately, how extremely partial I am in reality to Mrs. Sparkleton! She is a woman of wit and judgment, that never would have behaved in the extraordinarily senseless manner Lady Fitzhauton has."

"Oh, then, I'll tell you a way, my lord, to get entirely out of this scrape, and revenge yourself in quite a pleasant manner, without any danger of killing or being killed!" exclaimed Charity, with the enthusiasm of a great idea. "Set off immediately to Paris, and marry Mrs. Sparkleton before Lord Fitzhauton can get there! I know her direction—nobody else does—and I will give it you. That

will be the greatest revenge possible for you to take upon Lord Fitzhauton; that will silence all scandal, entirely refute Lady Fitzhauton, vex her very much, and make everything happy and straight again."

"My dear girl, this is really a most extraordinary idea—quite an inspiration!" said the viscount, after a brief pause of surprise. "It would certainly secure Mrs. Sparkleton's secrecy with regard to the letter; and she is a very rich and handsome woman; and it would be a divine trick to play that pampered puppy, Fitzhauton; a most sensible mortification to his silly wife—and really one owes society some reparation—and one oughtn't, if possible, to get entirely out of its good graces—and I am a little tired of Paris, and Italy's too hot, and St. Petersburg too cold, for my constitution. I don't like Germany, and should detest America; and it *is* almost time one got married. But yet, after all—"

"There are a million reasons for, and none that you can urge against it!" exclaimed Charity, filling up the pause of hesitation.

"But yet, I am afraid, she greatly prefers Lord Fitzhauton," continued the viscount.

"That is why it will be pleasanter for you to oust him, I should think, sir? Besides, you cannot be sure of that, for you have not yet tried sincerely to win her affections to yourself," returned the mediatrix.

"That is true again," mused the viscount, smoothing his whiskers meditatively; "and I don't imagine myself much inferior to Lord Fitzhauton in any respect, unless he is, perhaps, a little younger. Do you think he looks so, Miss Green?"

"I never compared you, sir; but I should think that would be another reason why you should triumph in winning the day from him," returned Charity.

"True again. Perhaps we might reverse the usual process, and hate one another before instead of after marriage. And I am certainly in a sad fix," said the viscount. "You have heard the anecdote, Miss Green, of the man who was to be hanged unless he married the ugliest woman in the province—it was somewhere in France, I believe. I could be almost tempted to imitate him and say, 'Drive on!' too."

"But Mrs. Sparkleton, I have heard every one say that ever saw her, is one of the handsomest women in the world!"

"Yes, and she has the *savoir-vivre* in perfection! *She* does not in the least smell of bread and butter! But supposing I were to follow out your very extraordinary idea, Miss Green, wouldn't people laugh at me—wouldn't people say—you know what reports Lady Fitzhauton would propagate?"

"She could not; here is the exact copy of the note that deceived her, with a

broken impression—and she would not dare to say anything for fear of being laughed at as a foolish, mistaken person, who imagined you were in love with her, when it will plainly appear by your marriage you were really and truly courting Mrs. Sparkleton!"

"But how do I know that Mrs. Sparkleton will receive my address, after what has passed?" said his lordship.

"I am sure she will," replied Charity, with great energy. "I am quite sure of that! You have only to go and declare yourself satisfied by the full contents of the note, whose blotted extracts alarmed you; and offer the best reparation you can by marriage, and I am *positive* you will not be refused."

"She instructed you then to say so?" returned the viscount, with a smile of much gratification; and as Charity kept a jesuitical silence, he continued,—"I must allow, I always admired Mrs. Sparkleton's good taste and judgment. It is the only

possible solution of one's perplexities, I think; so you had better drive on, in one sense, Mr. Carman Destiny! I will not be like that strange person, who would not even escape the *halter* by the *altar!*"

CHAPTER XIII.

THREE or four days after these occurrences, Lord Fitzhauton considered he had waited long enough for any expression of hostile sentiment from Lord Deville, without receiving any, and concluded that he might now depart for Paris without any appearance of a flight, or any danger of compromising Mrs. Sparkleton's reputation. Well pleased, he gave orders to his servants to prepare everything for a trip to the Continent, intending to start in the afternoon of the day in question.

Lord Fitzhauton enjoyed at present a very nice bachelor sort of existence. He

had the house to himself; his wife continued at Putney with her family, no doubt exasperated beyond reconciliation—at least he hoped so, after his treatment of her brother, and disdainful silence to herself. He had not his legs on the table,' as an American gentleman might have had under similar circumstances of tranquil domestic enjoyment—but he lolled at his ease, and in a most pleasant mood, in a swing chair, smoking a cigar in a room where even his aunt had never permitted him to do so. She, too, had not made her appearance since she had written him a most violent diatribe against Mrs. Sparkleton, threatening all the vengeance of the gods (and Miss Scurmucheon's were rather rum jokers!) on his head, (not to mention hellfire eternal,) unless he entirely and perpetually relinquished that lady's society; which epistle her noble nephew had very politely inclosed in a clean envelope and returned to her, as a valuable testimony to posterity of her regard for his true interests.

Smoking this cigar, which was a most delicious Dos Amigos, from the royal manufactory of Seville—for we love to be particular in the smallest matters that relate to great events—lulled into a delicious dream by the aromatic narcotic—thinking of Mrs. Sparkleton, and what a very, very handsome woman she was, and how her brilliant eyes would light up to welcome him in Paris that evening—his lordship seemed, to common observers, to be reading a newspaper which he held in his hand—neither can we absolutely declare that he was not—his eye was certainly running down the columns—only he did not take the least notice of what he read. It was no great wonder, perhaps: he was looking over some letter from a foreign correspondent, on foreign politics, and his lordship took little interest even in domestic ones, though he often voted on them. Still, the article was headed Paris, and that rather attracted his attention—only dreamily, however—until suddenly he gave a very natural

start, let his cigar fall, and clutched the newspaper almost to his eyes to read again the following *rather* unexpected announcement!

"The great talk in English circles just at present, is about a marriage which came off yesterday at the Embassy, in the grandest style imaginable. It has been so long on the *tapis*, that it will not surprise the fashionable world of London to hear that yesterday, in the chapel of the Embassy, by special licence, were united in the holy bonds of matrimony, the Right Honourable Viscount Deville, and the Honourable Mrs. Sparkleton, of Longacres, in the county of ——, widow of the late Colonel Sparkleton, of the Guards, sixth and youngest daughter of the late Right Honourable Baron St. Alwyn, and granddaughter of the Duke of ——. The celebrity of both parties in political and fashionable circles made the event remarkable, and we have rarely seen so distinguished a congregation

assembled as on the occasion. His Excellency gave the bride away, and a large party partook of a splendid *déjeuner* with the noble bride and bridegroom, after which the happy pair started to spend the honeymoon at a charming villa belonging to the late Colonel Sparkleton, at Chantilly."

This was too circumstantial a narrative to be doubted; Lord Fitzhauton was positive he held a newspaper in his hand of established authenticity in chronology of the kind; at least he had never believed it capable of invention before—and undoubtedly there was a certain aggregate of type and paper united under the usual heading beneath his gaze. Nevertheless he disbelieved in his own eyes, in the paper, in the type, in the narrative, and in himself, for nearly a couple of minutes. Then he looked again, and again, and again, and still the article was there. Then he whistled, and walked to the window, and satisfied himself that people

were moving about in a quiet, orderly manner, without any of the jumble and confusion of a dream. Then he walked to a mirror and satisfied himself of his own identity. Then he took the paper and read the article over three times more, and tried to persuade himself that the names were different, that it was *not* the Right Honourable Viscount and the Honourable Mrs. Sparkleton who were united, as the paper averred, in the holy bonds of matrimony. Then he dashed the paper down, and called himself the following names, omitting all his hereditary titles and distinctions: "Fool, ass, booby, simpleton!—to believe a woman, to trust in a woman!—Inexpressible ass, unutterable fool! But it can't be! She wouldn't dare!—I'll run to Deville's this instant, and see if he is not at home!"

He clutched up his hat, and was about to sally forth furiously on this fruitful enterprise, when two visitors entering cut short his progress. And to crown his

misfortunes those two visitors were his wife and her mother!

Both were in tears, both in disordered array, shorn of their usual splendours—and Lady Fitzhauton threw herself into her husband's arms, in spite of all his attempts to avoid the affecting ceremonial, while Mrs. Gullibull sobbed and wept aloud like the bubbling of a whale sinking transfixed with harpoons in the Arctic Seas! The only comparison we can find of sufficient grandeur to display all the energy of her effusion.

"O, my dear Fitzhauton! my own, own husband! you'll forgive me this one little time, won't you, and I'll never doubt you again? I see it was all that wicked Deville trying to set me against you!" sobbed her ladyship, strenuously imitating the admired simile of the vine round the elm.

"Look how that cigar's burning the carpet!—But she's come back never to leave you no more, on no account!"

ejaculated Mrs. Gullibull. "And I've come, too, for a 'sylum from my own house and home, for the bailiffs are in it, and John's made a regular smash, and we are all ruined, and I must stay here or go to the Refuge of the Destitute, or the Workhouse, for I'll never sit where that Girdiron's master; and besides, they'll ticket my very bed before they've done!"

"It is in the Gazette to-day!—Look, dear Charles, poor papa is in the Gazette to-day!" said Lady Fitzhauton, still weeping profoundly, and handing a paper, which Lord Fitzhauton had not yet seen, to his lordship.

She thought that Fitzhauton sought with those arid eyes and trembling fingers for the Gazette of the day. She ascribed it to the disorder of his spirits when she saw that he turned to the births, marriages, and deaths instead! But she changed her opinion, when in a moment, with a face livid with rage and despair, he exclaimed: "And have you the impu-

dence, Lady Fitzhauton, after your absurd behaviour with Lord Deville—after your absurd accusations against him and Mrs. Sparkleton—look here, madam—after this! —On the 13th ultimo, in the chapel of the British Embassy, at Paris, the Right Honourable—the Right Honourable—the Right Honourable—read it yourself, madam!—You and your mother may stay in the house if you like, but I'll not!" And out accordingly he flung.

On the same day, and about the same hour, Charity Green was seated at her usual place in the bazaar, at work, with her usual quiet, reflective face. Miss Dishnap was finishing the embroidery of a little scarlet coat, and enjoying her favourite recreation—listening to the tune of "She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps," exquisitely performed on the little musical box, which had belonged to her own departed betrothed, and which he had manufactured himself, for he had a mechanical genius

as well as one for his profession. The sweet, melancholy notes followed each other like driblets of harmonious water, so clearly and liquidly pure. The two friends were evidently reconciled. In fact, Miss Dishnap had nearly cried her eyes out over the success of her resolute refusal of the privileges of the *entrée* of her cottage to Charity Green. She spent the whole day in seeking for her in every place but the bazaar, whither Charity proceeded immediately after her interview with Lord Deville; and even, in her remorse, consented to receive her back to hearth and home without asking any questions as to her whereabouts on that memorable night, which Charity quietly assured her she could not possibly explain at present.

Thus were they engaged when Mr. Bagshawe's shadow suddenly fell upon both, and raising the little counter, he entered the sacred inclosure to which he had never yet penetrated, with very little

ceremony. He had on the whitest possible cravat, and he did not look very much more coloured himself.

"Have you seen the paper this morning, Charity?—No, you never read it for fear it should spoil the simplicity of your character? Well, Gullibull, Gullibull and Co. are in the Gazette this morning!—Which was right, you or I, you softcake, you?"

"You, sir," said Charity, after tremulously perusing a paragraph in the city article, which announced, in tones of consternation, the fall of the great house in question.

"Well!—but I've come for the forfeit of my bond—not for my pound of flesh, but for my eight stone and upwards, which I am sure you must weigh, considering your luxurious style of living here! You remember your promise?"

"And I will keep it," replied Charity, firmly.

"You will! you are not in jest!—You

will marry me, after all?" exclaimed Mr. Bagshawe, breathlessly.

"Why not?" replied Charity, busily plying her work.

"Why not?—Don't you see how terribly ugly I am?—quite a death's head on a broomstick?"

"No, I positively don't!"

"That's because you don't look at me, Charity!" replied the retired attorney, with vehemence. "What need you care about that lace? Look at your bargain, and let it go to the devil!" And he tore the delicate tracery away with a violence that destroyed all hope of retrieving the pattern.

"Well, then, I do look at you—and I don't see that you are ugly at all, and if you really want to marry me, I'll marry you," said Charity, with great simplicity of expression—"certainly."

"You are a generous creature, Charity—but, no, I won't be a horrid old tyrant in a novel, and force a girl to marry me

against her will!—I came for another purpose, Charity," he continued, with energy, and yet with an evident struggle. "You may be happy yet!—as that stupid organ is grinding out in the street,—and it lies! However, you shall have the chance, if you think it so. Midas Gullibull is thoroughly ruined—a bankrupt with his father to-day—and I have been sounding him. I find that he repents very much of his treatment of you—especially since I have told him that you have two thousand pounds of mine for a fortune, and that all my property is left to you in my will, at my death. I promised I would plead his cause for him, since you wouldn't let me plead my own, and so—I have his authority to inform you, that—that you may be Mrs. Midas Gullibull any day and any hour you please."

"And you—have my authority to inform Mr. Midas Gullibull," replied Charity, without a moment's pause, "that

and I intend to be Mrs. Bagshawe this day week, I can't possibly accept the honour."

"What a hurry you are in!—You want to kill me with joy, that you may get my money," said Bagshawe, almost convulsively.

"No, you hard loaf, you!" replied Charity Green; "I want to marry you immediately, that I may have a home and a house to offer to my poor uncle and aunt, now they are turned out of their own!"

CHAPTER XIV.

ON that day a formless Infinite of Terror,—a myriad-eyed, myriad-handed, air-clutching, sky-darkening shadow—a thing of doubt and darkness, flickering all over with palpitations like a troubled sea—loomed over the commercial horizon. It thickened gradually into palpable obscure, which wore by turns a million-changing forms of doubt and fear, until it became the steady vision of a tremendous phantom—and its name was PANIC!

The failure of the great house of Gullibull, Gullibull and Co., confessedly through railway speculations, increased the deep feeling of mistrust which had

for some time been gaining ground in the public mind, as to the reality of its visionary El Dorado of iron. It was followed by others. Numerous defalcations were discovered—false dealings brought to light; and the whole gorgeous vision—more baseless than the fabric of a dream—dissolved away, leaving its dupes and victims gazing at one another, in as much amazement as the drinking boors in Faust, when they imagined they were clutching grapes, and found they were only pulling at each other's noses!

Then, indeed, were there "hurryings to and fro," and "tremblings of distress!" Aristocratic vehicles, seldom or never seen eastward of Temple Bar, were now more commonly encountered in the city than anywhere else. Miss Scurmucheon's brougham was among the earliest; for she had started a brougham on the strength of her success in railroad ventures. She, the most punctilious of formalists, forgot that her carriage was to be one of

the mourners at a funeral on that Va day, and hurried down to Mr. Lawless's offices, to ascertain the truth, or, as she fondly hoped, the falsehood, of the alarming reports which had reached her. She had been there seven times since she had heard the shocking intimation from Mrs. Skinflintz, that Lawless had eloped; had always been comforted by his clerk's assurances, that Mr. Lawless was only accidentally out for a few minutes; had waited hours for him in vain, three times; and being irritated to excess that morning by reading the news of Mrs. Sparkleton's marriage with Lord Deville, in the paper, and an alarming account of the state of the railway market in a parallel column, she was now determined to ascertain the truth, and—sell out.

Miss Scurmucheon was a religious woman, as we have often shown, we think. She had every reason to place confidence in the assurances that the prosperity of the reprobate is only of a short and earthly

nature. Nevertheless, she was so excessively vexed at Mrs. Sparkleton's mundane success, that we are not certain she would not greatly have preferred to hear of her having effected her utter ruin "in society," by eloping with Lord Fitzhauton, even though involving so destructively the good name and fortunes of her beloved nephew. She certainly wondered what Providence could have been about to permit such good luck to such a "dreadful creature!" She must have deceived Lord Deville in the most unprincipled manner! If his lordship had only consulted *her*—if he had only waited till he heard what people said about Mrs. Sparkleton—if he had only had some friend to tell him that she was positively ruined by extravagance and speculation—and instead of taking a pleasure jaunt to the continent, had actually fled thither from her creditors!—

But there were more people ruined than Mrs. Sparkleton. Miss Scurmucheon, in her way through the city, was a good

deal annoyed and detained near the Mansion House, by a crowd escorting a prisoner, who was to be favoured with an introduction to the Lord Mayor. She heard the people say that it was some merchant's clerk, accused of embezzling money, to buy railway shares. That excited her interest, and she put on her spectacles, which she never wore in the sight of any one if she could help it, to see the justly-devoted one pass. And how amazed was Miss Scurmucheon to discover in the prim, precise, elderly, orderly-looking individual, who was hurried past, in the capacity of criminal —Messrs. Gullibull and Co.'s head-clerk, Mr. Rustisaw! He who had seemed to cherish almost a hatred to speculation of every kind, but of railway speculation in particular; whose grand endeavour it had always been to prevent his master from engaging in the perilous game—had all the while been falsifying his books, and embezzling large sums of money, to em-

bark, secretly, in the same delusion! Midas Gullibull came after him, in the capacity of prosecutor—by order of the assignees, ostensibly, but a good deal more by suggestion of the rancorous vengeance and malignancy which filled his heart.

Miss Scurmucheon did not like to see this spectacle; it added to her alarms, and she ordered her coachman to drive on faster, and "not to mind the crowd." Whether that meant to drive over its component parts, in case of obstruction, we will not even surmise, concerning a lady of sentiments so Christian. But the increased diligence was of little use, except to reach an unwished-for goal the sooner. Miss Scurmucheon found her agent's offices closed, and they had been so, a neighbour informed her, for two days. No one knew whither either Lawless or his clerk had gone; but perhaps the latter young gentleman himself, or somebody else who desired to set inquiring minds at rest on the subject, had written on the closed shutters—"Gone to California!"

We have now reached a point at which it is usual with novelists in general—though we rather claim to *ourself* the designation of fictitious historian—to sum up with a brief sketch of the concluding events of the lives of the heroes and heroines they have introduced to the reader's attention. But as we are cotemporary with all of ours, the most we can do to gratify the curiosity we hope to have excited, is to give some account of the present position of affairs with such of our personages as seem to deserve the distinction.

Lord and Lady Fitzhauton have been what is technically called "reconciled;" and live together *as man and wife.* How that is, let the initiated declare! Miss Scurmucheon says, they live *like cat and dog;* and perhaps that may be a proper explanation of the mysterious form of speech above quoted. All *we* can say is, that they live in the same house; generally take dinner together; have been known

to go into the country at the same time; and have two little girls who call one of them Papa and the other Mamma. No male heir to the family honours has appeared—which Lady Deville often hears with great regret; at least, she often makes the inquiry of English people that go to Paris, and always seems very sorry; and says, "Poor things! how grieved Lord Fitzhauton must be! Such an ancient family as his! But, then, the poor boy—if there were one—would be so ashamed of his maternal ancestors!" In fact, things are just as well as they are; for although the Fitzhauton lineage is very ancient and honourable, it is pretty well known that his lordship will leave but little property to sustain the dignity of the rank he could bequeath. His extravagance has nearly carried him through the second and very splendid fortune he acquired with his wife.

Lord and Lady Deville reside almost constantly at Paris—only occasionally

frightened out of it by a revolution or so, when they generally go to some of the German capitals. Last year they were almost driven to England by finding a revolution wherever they fled from one; but so obstinately determined is his lordship not to discharge her ladyship's liabilities in railways, that, although extremely anxious to be at home and to go to his club as usual, "he really can't come." He wrote so to a friend the other day. At the same time he don't much care to leave her ladyship in Paris by herself. It almost seems as if he were jealous of her—and yet there are malicious people who declare that they are not at all fond of one another, and that Lord Deville has been heard to declare, he almost wishes he were in Colonel Sparkleton's *present* place rather in that which his demise left vacant. We may hope, however, to see Lady Deville in London soon—probably next season. Almostallher speculations are being wound up under the Railway Abandonment Bill;

and as she has forfeited an incredible number of shares for not paying up the calls upon them, it is very likely that she will soon be quite at her ease on their account.

Longacres is sold. The mortgagee, Tobias Skinflintz, Esq., is its present proprietor, and his mother is looking forward with no little pride to the prospect of seeing him a Member of Parliament for some neighbouring village belonging to a noble lord who "owes her a little money," as soon as the "dishabilities are removed."

Meanwhile Lady Deville leads a very delightful life in Paris, spending but little time at home, or on her noble husband. She "rather likes the French way of living. One is not bothered with thinking—one need only talk," she said the other day to a particular friend, who was inquiring, as particular friends will do, the most disagreeable question he could put—Why she did not intend to grace London again with her presence occasionally?

She is very happy! Lord Deville and

she lead the most well-bred married life possible, as you might expect from people of such fashion and sensibility to appearances. Mademoiselle Florine, indeed, told Mrs. Clackmannan's maid—on a late excursion of that vigilant invalid to the republican metropolis—in strict confidence, of course, that there had been two explosions between them—and only two. One was shortly after their marriage, on receipt of some intelligence from England —about the sale of Longacres, she believed. The other took place about some letter which arrived from the same country, of which, with every effort on her part, the said Mademoiselle has never yet managed to obtain a perusal. But she believes it was from Lord Fitzhauton, because her lady cried nearly half an hour over it, and Lord Deville—who found her so engaged —declared in her hearing that if ever the viscountess *dared* (that was his word!) *dared* to receive a letter from "that man," (and who else could he possibly

mean?) see, speak, or correspond in any manner whatever with him,—he, Lord Deville, would leave her entirely to him!

"But, however," said Lady Deville, with exasperation, in private, after she had given a solemn promise to that effect, "when one goes back to London, one can't help one's self—one will be sure to see him somewhere or another in society!"

Miss Scurmucheon is so very badly off in her pecuniary affairs, that we might be excused if, like the rest of the world, we overlooked the fact of her existence. She has lost a very considerable portion of an already narrow income by her railway investments, or rather non-investments; for it is some consolation to her to find that, owing to Lawless having run away with her money, instead of embarking it in the shares she had requested, she is not liable to be completely ruined as a contributor to the defalcations of the concerns in question. But she has a perpetual and potent source

of regret in an attendant circumstance. There can be no doubt that the Reverend Gilbart Ruddimac had at one time some serious thoughts of offering his hand and heart to her acceptance. But an *exposé* of the affairs of a certain company in which he knew her to be connected, turned the current of his affections in another direction.

Still her own misfortunes have not in the least diminished the charitable feelings which always animated Miss Scurmucheon. She begs with more energy than ever for the poor, and perhaps with more success; for people do rather compassionate her fallen estate, and like to rid themselves of her importunities at almost any price. We have the comfort to assure our readers that she still lives in a manner and in a place not altogether unsuited to her rank in society—in a street that has been fashionable, and on a hundred a year.

Where are Alderman and Mrs. Gulli-

bull?" Both at Mr. Bagshawe's, at Camberwell. The alderman is only just out of the Queen's Bench, where he has expiated the sin of "reckless trading," as the learned gentleman who harangued against him not untruly styled the process which furnished him with a subject for eloquence, by an imprisonment which has effectually broken his spirit. The enterprising, daring merchant is dead in his bosom; and but for Mrs. Bagshawe's incessant kindness and attentions, the outward presentment of the once mighty alderman would probably be in the same predicament. We have hopes, however, and so has Mr. Bagshawe, that he will recover his health and spirits, and resume his natural activity in a short time. Perhaps he may make another fortune before he dies. He has talked about doing so ever since Mr. Bagshawe promised, at his wife's entreaty, that he would lend him whatever he got for his three thousand

pounds, to recommence business. That may possibly be five or six hundred pounds; and the alderman relates, with some sparkles of his former genius, that he began the vast fortune he lost with about as many—minus the hundreds.

The alderman, however, is not likely to leave what he may again acquire to either of his children. They are considered to have behaved rather unhandsomely to him. At least, he thinks that they ought to have taken more notice of him in his misfortunes; but, as Midas has hardly enough to live upon himself, from a clerkship he has in a brewery—and as Lady Fitzhauton has "a husband and children of her own to look to," we cannot see what right he has to complain, if they have tacitly agreed to cut him. Especially as they both agree—agreeing on that point only—that their father most bitterly wronged them in getting ruined at all.

It must be allowed that Mrs. Gullibull is rather a nuisance in the Bagshawe house, where she takes upon her still to be mistress; is very dictatorial, and sufficiently tedious in dissertations on her misfortunes. But Charity Bagshawe has such an inexhaustible fount of patience in her soul—she is so kind, so thoughtful, so unprovokable, that, on the whole, they work on pretty well together. Moreover, Mrs. Gullibull is very fond of managing a house, and Charity, on the contrary, has taken to reading, and likes to spend most of her time with Mr. Bagshawe, who has communicated his own taste for literature to her.

We do not believe they have any family. The last time we saw her she was, however, with a pretty numerous one. She and Miss Dishnap, and two or three other ladies, were waiting on the platform of a railway, at a short distance from town, with a numerous band of

about two hundred female children, belonging to a Sunday school, which they keep and teach among them, and whom they had taken out on an excursion *en masse*. The children were all very cleanly, though mostly very poorly dressed, and seemed all as happy as they could live—shouting, singing, and hurrahing, enough to frighten the fiery horses that were to draw them, if they had been fashioned of less solid materials than wood and iron. Charity looked very much fluttered and very much pleased—very responsible, and very happy, and seemed as if—whether herself a mother or not—that she had found objects on which to diffuse the motherly feelings in her gentle heart. We heard one of the girls exclaim, "Teacher, teacher! what is the use of those iron rails?" To which Mrs. Bagshawe replied, partly to herself and partly to the child—"After all, they are very good things!—the carriages run on those,

dear, and have brought you out of town, to breathe the nice sweet air of the country so cheaply that we are thinking of bringing you all again next week.— After all, they are very good things!"

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